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THE

ART OF AUTHORSHIP

Literary Reminiscences,

Methods of Work, and Advice to Young Beginners,

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PERSONALLY CONTRIBUTED BY

LEADING AUTHORS OF THE DAY.

COMPILED AND EDITED BY

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INTRODUCTION.

SOME time since I was requested by a number of young men to address them upon the art of composition and effective public speech. Thinking how best to make such a topic interesting as well as instructive, I resolved to illustrate the lecture by securing, if at all possible, personal experiences and counsels from a few of the leading writers and speakers of our day. Appealing to several well-known authors and orators, and receiving valued and helpful replies, I was induced to extend the number of such personal testimonies, with the idea of giving them to those for whom they were designed in a more permanent form than an address spoken from the lecture platform. This volume is the outcome, so far as the above-mentioned communications bear directly upon the art of effective written composition.

I must ask my readers to remember that

the experiences and methods of those authors only are here quoted who have personally contributed, at my request, their reminiscences and advice. If, therefore, any gratitude should be felt for pleasure or profit experienced by a perusal of these pages, it must be accorded to those without whose aid and generous acquiescence the book could never have been written. Several names of eminent living writers will not be found here. In most instances their help has been requested, but has either been withheld or has proved insufficient for the purpose required. Accounts of their methods might have been gleaned from other sources, but these would have broken the harmony of the book, which contains only those experiences and counsels written for the purposes above stated by the authors themselves.

In dealing with so large a number of communications of so varied a character as those which compose the bulk of this volume, it has been impossible to classify them with any approach to consistency. I have used them, as best I could without injury to their original form, to illustrate and enforce several points

of interest, which every student of expressive written composition may with advantage consider. As example must be always better than precept, statements of how our best known authors learned to write, or what influences aided them the most in preparing for and finding their life-work, together with whatever counsel drawn from their own experience they may be disposed to give to others, cannot fail to be both instructive and deeply interesting. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise."

Several of the authors quoted here have been called away by death since this compilation was first attempted—some even while its pages were passing through the press, and when intimation of their decease was no longer possible. Thankfully do I honour their memory, rejoicing in the thought that they lived, and in living gave to the world such enduring riches. For while their books remain they themselves cannot die, nor can their work be ended. They still give dignity and sweetness to other lives, living again "in minds made better by their presence." It may be that among their many claims

upon the grateful remembrance of their countrymen, not the least is to be looked for in the fact that they have taught us, both by precept and example, that careless speaking or slovenly writing is an insult to the public, and that bad English is a crime.

Coventry, 1890.

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GOOD WRITING: A GIFT OR AN ART?

GOOD WRITING: A GIFT OR AN ART?

Mrs. Craik.

WRITING only a few days before her lamented death, the gifted author of "John Halifax, Gentleman," DINAH MARIA CRAIK, a lady whose enlightened and liberal spirit, and whose simplicity and grace of style have made her books favourites with nearly two generations of readers, said, "I believe composition is a gift, not an art,—impossible to teach, though it may be improved by study. The only suggestion I can make is: Say what you have to say as briefly and simply as you can, avoiding long words and involved sentences, and preferring good Saxon-English to Latinised. In writing, as in most other things, to be your own natural self without affectation is the truest wisdom."

Mrs. Craik is not alone in believing that the native power and temperament, the outfit at birth, counts for much.

Hall Caine.

Mr. HALL CAINE, the author of several carefully composed and powerfully imaginative stories—books so full of good work as to entitle their writer's opinion to a respectful consideration,—asserts his conviction that the writer has a natural ear for the music of words. "Without that ear no great prose, as well as no great verse, was ever yet written. Carlyle's ear, with all his angularities of manner, was one of the very finest. Jeremy Taylor's ear was perhaps perfect. So in another way was old Thomas Fuller's. Then how fine was Bunyan's! All these writers had different ears for the music of style, or say the same ear but for different harmonies. Then Dr. Johnson's ear was fine, but its powers limited in range, and so he gives us only one great strain of music, the music of verbal antithesis. Landor's ear was of very wide range, and so is Mr. Ruskin's. Mr. Blackmore has the finest ear of any man now living for the inverted style of old English, and I like, almost as much, the direct strains of Wilkie Collins. Some writers have a fine sweet air running through everything they write. Others, again, give no sensation of that kind. So without this natural ear

for prose I don't think any writer will ever do great things." Mr. Caine tells us how he reached his own special excellence in authorship: "In my youth I read with great avidity some models that are usually considered dangerous, and I remember that my imitative instinct was then so strong that my own writing always reflected the author whom I had been reading last. Thus I began, oddly enough, by copying Lord Brougham's weighty eloquence, and then went on to imitate Coleridge's involved sentences, and finally, Carlyle's archaisms. My models were many and not always good ones, for I had no guide whatever but my own taste, being self-educated as far as it is possible for any one to be so. When I began to write for the public in newspapers it was complained that my style was too elaborate, too involved, and much too ornate. Of course I used the choicest and newest words in my vocabulary, and made the mistake that older men are not always free from of displaying my knowledge of long words, and so proving unwittingly that they were strangers to me. I remember that my first book was a good deal disfigured by the same excess, and that I had

Hall Caine.

Hall Caine.

published at least three books before a better manner became natural. The real turning-point was the time when I had to write in great haste for a daily paper. Having to dictate a leading article was a sore tax on my arts of self-mystification in labyrinths of words, and a simpler style grew necessary by the very method of production. Short, sharp, pithy sentences took the place of long and windy ones, and I realised that I was a better writer."

Marie Corelli.

The same opinion as to natural gift is expressed by one of the latest, and certainly one of the most promising of our younger authors, MARIE CORELLI. "As you ask me whether in 'early life' I gave myself to any special training for the literary profession, I think it is but fair to tell you that I am *in* 'early life' still (I suppose you would not call a woman of four-and-twenty very old!), and that, therefore, my 'training,' if training be considered a *sine quâ non*, must perforce be going on in my case now, however unconsciously to myself. I never thought of writing till two years and a half ago,* when, in order to disburden my mind of

* This letter was written in September, 1888.

certain thoughts that clamoured for utterance, I produced 'A Romance of Two Worlds,'—my first book, which met with instant success, much to my own astonishment and pleasure. Encouraged thus, I followed up the 'Romance' by 'Vendetta!' and 'Thelma,' and I am now busily engaged on my fourth book. My education has been varied, almost desultory, half foreign, half English, the usual sort of thing bestowed on young ladies who are not expected to do aught in the world but dress fashionably and make themselves agreeable. For the rest I have educated myself. Always fond of literature, I have, by choice and free-will, studied Homer and the Classics, the best French, German and Italian authors, together with all the finest works in the English language—particularly the poets, such as Byron, Keats, Shelley, and the king of them all, Shakespeare; and I have systematically and persistently avoided reading the penny newspapers, detesting their morbidness, vulgarity, and triviality. The mere news, stated in the telegrams, has always sufficed for me; and I have fed my mind on books in lieu of leading articles. Method I have none, unless it may

Marie Corelli.

Marie Corelli.

be called methodical to go to my desk at 10 a.m. and depart from thence at 2 p.m.; during which space of time I may do a little, a great deal, or nothing at all, according to my humour. I write for the love of writing, not for the sake of money or reputation—the former I have without exertion, the latter is not worth a pin's point in the general economy of the vast universe.

"I do not think it possible to 'train' any one to be an author. The literary faculty is a gift not to be attained by any amount of the most patient and arduous study. It is the outcome of the mind's expression; and the questions I would ask of any would-be writer, are not 'Have you studied the art?' or, 'Have you trained yourself?'—no!—but 'Have you a thought, and is it worth the telling?' If so, declare it, simply and with fervour, regardless of what it may bring; write it as you would speak it, and if it has true value it will reach its mark. To write for the sake of gaining a livelihood only is a terrible mistake, one that hundreds of authors commit every day. Art always frowns on those who are too ready to barter her for gold. Work done for the love of working brings its own

reward far more quickly and surely than work done for mere payment. So far, at least, has been my short experience, which is possibly interesting on account of my exceptional and rapid success; and most of the authors I have come in contact with are dissatisfied and insatiate for money—a mood in which inspiration is most absolutely quenched and killed. *Marie Corelli.*

"You speak of the 'formation of style'; this I feel sure can never be done by any system of study, as it is so essentially the result of the inner formation of thought. As a man *thinks*, so will he speak, and so must he write, if he elects to handle the pen. This assertion is borne out by the fact that every author's 'style' is different; precisely for the reason that no two men think alike on the same subject. In short, I, personally speaking, owe nothing to systematic training; and I believe the biographies of many authors will show the same condition of things. Too much study leaves the brain no room for original creative work, and deadens the imaginative faculties; and without imagination, all literary work is more or less feeble, especially in the line of fiction. It is necessary to observe men and

Marie Corelli.

manners more than books, and to heedfully note the vagaries of one's own heart even more than men and manners, for, as Emerson says, 'He who writes to his own heart, writes to an eternal public.' Therein lies the secret of Shakespeare's perpetual charm.

"To conclude with a few details, I may add that though I write rapidly, I correct and revise with an almost fastidious care. The great Balzac was content to consider and reconsider one sentence many times before passing it to the public; and nowadays when slovenly, slip-shod and ungrammatical English is, most unfortunately, prevalent in our leading magazines and lighter works of romance, travel and adventure, it behoves all those who write in the noble speech used by Shakespeare to be more than ever particular in the choice of words, the flow of language, and the complete avoidance of slang. The literature of this progressive age ought surely to be able to hold its own with that of the Addison and Steele era; but so long as the vulgar 'society' papers continue to have their thousands of readers, so long will fine taste and comprehension of good literature be rare among the majority of men.

Finally, to quote the old adage, 'Poets are born, not made'—and so are novelists, essayists, and scientists, believe me! and no culture will make a man an author if it is not in him; while as for method, there are no such *un*-methodical beings in the world as literary celebrities! They are the joyous 'Bohemians' of society, all the world is their nation; they wander here, there, and everywhere with the most delightful freedom from routine and restraint, and for those who love their work, I think a literary life is the most enjoyable under the sun. But for those who take to it from sheer necessity, and grind drearily on, day after day, counting the pages they cover, and wondering vaguely how much they will get for it all when it is done, no existence is more bitter, disappointing, and fatiguing; and I would never advise any one to take to the literary profession, unless the love of it was so strong and passionate that nothing else would suffice them for happiness." *Marie Corelli.*

Professor THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY evidently holds the same opinion regarding the literary faculty. "I never had the fortune, *Prof. Huxley.*

Prof. Huxley.

good or evil," he says, "to receive any guidance or instruction in the art of English composition. It is possibly for that reason I have always turned a deaf ear to the common advice to 'study good models,' to 'give your days and nights to the study of Addison,' and so on. Buffon said that a man's style is his very self, and in my judgment it ought to be so. The business of a young writer is not to ape Addison or Defoe, Hobbes or Gibbon, but to make his style himself, as they made their styles themselves. They were great writers, in the first place, because, by dint of learning and thinking, they had acquired clear and vivid conceptions about one or other of the many aspects of men or things. In the second place, because they took infinite pains to embody these conceptions in language exactly adapted to convey them to other minds. In the third place, because they possessed that purely artistic sense of rhythm and proportion which enabled them to add grace to force, and, while loyal to truth, make exactness subservient to beauty.

"I cannot say that the principles I have laid down have been my own guides; they are

rather the result of a long experience. A considerable vein of indolence runs through my composition, and forty years ago there was nothing I disliked so much as the labour of writing. It was a task I desired to get over and done with as soon as possible. The result was such as might be expected. *Prof. Huxley.*

"If there is any merit in my English now, it is due to the fact that I have by degrees become awake to the importance of the three conditions of good writing which I have mentioned. I have learned to spare no labour upon the process of acquiring clear ideas—to think nothing of writing a page four or five times over if nothing less will bring the words which express all that I mean, and nothing more than I mean; and to regard rhetorical verbosity as the deadliest and most degrading of literary sins. Any one who possesses a tolerably clear head and a decent conscience should be able, if he will give himself the necessary trouble, thus to fulfil the first two conditions of a good style. The carrying out of the third depends, neither on labour nor on honesty, but on that sense which is inborn in the literary artist, and can by no means be

Prof. Huxley. given to him who has it not as his birthright. I should so much like to flatter myself that I am one of the 'well-born' in this respect that I dare not speculate on the subject. Vanity, like sleeping dogs, should be let lie."

Jean Ingelow. JEAN INGELOW, the author of a few stories and of many poems, valuable no less for the thought that is everywhere apparent than for the loftiness of their aim and the spiritual refinement that distinguishes their literary style, bears testimony in the same direction as the writers already quoted. She says, "I did not at any time of my life study with a view to the formation of style, but I always took a delight in beautiful thoughts well expressed. I did not of course foresee that I should be a writer of books, and only found out that I could write by writing. If you wish to mention my case to young people who would fain write well, it should, I think, be rather as a warning than an example. I did not learn to write verse any more than children who have an ear for music learn to sing in tune; they do that by nature, and so I wrote verse from the first without false rhymes. The difference between

a natural gift and an acquired possession is not enough considered. The present which is made to some of us at our birth is not that same thing which the others can acquire by study, by thought, and by time. But though what is acquired is not the same, yet those who have a gift can never make it what it was meant to be until the other has been added. I regret that I did not enrich my mind with wide knowledge, did not make myself thorough mistress of any science. For style is mainly expression. I believe that it comes by nature, but those can use it best who have most to express, and I might have had more. There will probably be among your readers some who can express gracefully and forcefully whatever they know and feel. I think they should cultivate their minds and let their style alone. There will be others who know a great deal already, but have no power to express it. These should intently study our best writers, find out, not what they said, but how they said it—in how few words they could make their meaning clear, and with what graceful art they could advance their opinions." *Jean Ingelow.*

Louise Chandler Moulton.

Speaking of her own style of writing, the graceful American poet, LOUISE CHANDLER MOULTON, says, "I hardly know what to say about it. I don't think I ever consciously tried for it. It was partly instinct, partly love of the best books. Words are a delight to me, as colours are to a painter. I cannot express my pleasure in a beautiful sentence. I think one can't acquire a good style unless one has the natural gift, as one must have an ear for music. Then this gift must be cultivated by the careful and constant reading of the best masters. Any one can use words *correctly*, but to use them forcibly, picturesquely is another thing. A gift for music, art, literature, needs cultivation; but there must be the gift to cultivate. To dig about a weed and water it will not turn it into a rose."

"Rita."

A somewhat strange experience is related by Mrs. RITA L. VON BOOTH, the popular author of many light, sparkling novels, who sends her books into the world under the *nom de guerre* of "Rita." "I can only say that to me the art of composition has always seemed a natural gift. My early life was passed in a wild part

of Australia. I have never been to school, and I am sure my education would make a poor show beside that of the 'High School' young lady of the present day, or the still more ambitious 'Girton' girl. I was always very fond of writing essays on any subject, and would often do them for my brothers for the mere pleasure of the composition. The idea of writing books never entered my head until two years after I was married, and then it was suggested by my husband, and taken up by myself as an experiment. I am afraid if you knew the manner in which I write my stories you would be very disappointed. Most of my literary friends are shocked, as I never draw out plots, or give much thought to the book, but simply dash it off as the fancy takes me. Writing is so little effort that I often fear I do too much. You see I am very frank with you, as I ought to be after your appreciative letter —but I have always maintained that to write fluently and gracefully is a natural gift, though a gift that must be elaborated and cultivated just like any other." *"Rita."*

A few words from another writer of light *Mrs. M. Hungerford.*

Mrs. M. Hungerford.

fiction may not be unacceptable. Mrs. M. HUNGERFORD, the author of "Molly Bawn," and of an almost incredible number of stories, spirited in plot, sparkling in dialogue, however lacking they may be in higher elements of thought and expression, says of herself, "I write when the desire to do so comes into my head, and I fling my pen aside when I feel dull. I wrote my first accepted story when I was eighteen; but when I was about nine or ten, I remember I used to write poetry that now makes me hot all over only to think of. I wrote at school a composition on 'Rain' that took the prize, and this I always look upon as my first betrayal of any little talent in the writing line I may possess. I do not think all the study in the world will produce that talent, but if the talent is there it should be carefully cultivated. I myself read a great deal, and so, I suppose, does every other author. I wrote totally unaided. I knew no author when I began. I had not a single 'friend at Court.' I merely mention this as an encouragement to any who may feel nervous about beginning."

G. A. HENTY, an author standing in the front rank of writers for young people, whose stories, full of stirring adventure and healthy stimulus, are told in a delightfully crisp and animated style, makes the same assertion regarding mental endowment. "I do not think," he says, "that any teaching system, or course of instruction, can result in turning out an author. With prose writers or with poets a man is born, not made. If he has a natural gift for it he will turn out a good writer, if not nothing will make him so. I think that a turn for writing is shown young, just as a turn for art is almost always displayed in early boyhood. Dickens makes David Copperfield, whose life was sketched from his own, tell stories to his schoolfellows in bed. A classical education may possibly assist in forming style, but I think the aid is small, for scarcely one of the prominent novelists of the day is a University man, and women who know nothing about the classics are as good writers of fiction as men are. The number of boys with an instinct for writing is small. When I edited *The Union Jack*, we had prize competitions for tales, &c.; but of many hundreds, I may

G. A. Henty.

G. A. Henty.

say thousands, of tales and essays sent in for these competitions, there were not half-a-dozen that showed any promise of excellence.

"As to my own experience, I began young. I was always a great hand at story-telling at school, and always got the highest marks in every form for English composition. When about twenty I wrote my first novel. It was very bad, no doubt, and was of course never published, but the plot was certainly a good one. At one-and-twenty I went out to the Crimea in the Commissariat Department. Some of my letters home were taken by my father to the editor of *The Morning Advertiser*—a perfect stranger to him—who read them, and at once appointed me correspondent to the paper in the Crimea. For the next ten years I had other work to do; then I again turned to writing, and soon after I was thirty obtained the berth of special correspondent to *The Standard*. I wrote two novels, then no other book for some time. I came to writing for boys in this wise. I used always to have my children with me for an hour after dinner, and to tell them stories. These stories were continuous, and often lasted

for weeks. One day it struck me, If my young ones like my stories, why should not others? I, therefore, each day wrote a chapter and read it to them, instead of telling it; and when the story was of proper length sent it to a publisher who at once accepted it. Since then I have written some thirty-five story-books. *G. A. Henty.*

"My advice to boys who want to become authors would be this: Write a story and get some person in whose judgment you have confidence to give you his opinion frankly whether there is any promise in it. If he says no, give the thing up altogether. If he says yes, and you really feel that you have a talent for telling stories, and find that your stories are liked by your schoolfellows, then write, and write, and write. Burn all you write, for until you are two or three and twenty you will certainly not write anything worth reading. But the habit of writing will improve your style and give you facility, and if there is really anything in you, you ought by that time to be able to turn out good stuff."

R. M. BALLANTYNE, another story-writer for boys, the author of a large number of books *R. M. Ballantyne.*

R. M. Ballantyne.

which every healthy-minded boy may read with moral advantage as well as exciting interest, bears similar testimony. "I have had no training for the life-work to which I have been called," he says. "The power with which you credit me, whatever may be its value, I regard as a direct gift from God. By that I mean that, not only did I receive no special training with a view to literature as a profession, but for many years I was placed in circumstances adverse to such training—six years of my early manhood having been spent in the backwoods of America, where I saw not more than half-a-dozen books, and no newspapers at all from one year's end to the other! I mention this not to show that the absence of training is an advantage, but that the powers given to us may sometimes be used with considerable advantage in spite of the want of training. At the same time I cannot express too forcibly my belief that such want of training is a very great misfortune, which cannot be too earnestly guarded against by young people who are either aiming at a literary career or desirous of acquiring an agreeable and correct

style.'' Of course the spending of many years in writing books has been of itself a species of training to me, and I could not have reached the present period of my life without having formed some clear and definite ideas on the subject of composition. . . . I may add that, in my experience, 'correcting the press' has been the cutting out of redundancies, parentheses, needless adjectives and conjunctions, the simplification of sentences, and the changing of inappropriate words for those that are more suitable. My practice has always been to give my whole mind to my subject when composing, never allowing thoughts of style or diction to hamper me; but attending to these carefully when revising the manuscript for press." *R. M. Ballantyne.*

JOHN STRANGE WINTER is the *nom de guerre* of Mrs. Henrietta E. V. Stannard, the author of the popular story, "Bootle's Baby," "to whom we owe," as John Ruskin so truly says, "the most finished and faithful rendering ever yet given of the character of the British soldier." "I hardly know myself," she confesses, "how or why I am able to write the *John Strange Winter.*

John Strange Winter.

books I do. I was a thorough bad lot at school, bright, I think, and quick, but with no perseverance whatever, no patience, no application. And certainly now I have all those qualities in an extraordinary degree. I don't know what changed me. I had an immense ambition to be a writer; and when my father died in '77, leaving nothing—well, it was that or something less palatable. At that time I was just twenty-one. I had done a little—I think I had made under £50. After that I went in for writing to the exclusion of everything else. I was not well educated, for I never would learn; but I had lived with a scholarly gentleman—my father was Rev. H. V. Palmer, rector of St. Margaret's, York—and I had always been from a little child a voracious reader, and determined to get on. Up to that time I had cared only for men's novels, the Kingsleys, Charles Reade, Whyte Melville, W. Collins and Mortimer Collins; but after I had been writing awhile, I found myself gradually slipping into the Rhoda Broughton school. Then all at once I awoke to the folly of letting myself drift into a first-person, present-tense style, which I thoroughly despised, and a lecture of

Mr. Ruskin's to art students put me on the right track. After that, how I worked! I have many a time written a story eight or nine times over before I satisfied myself with it. I used to take a novel of W. Collins and pick the sentences to pieces, note the crisp, concise style of them, and get them into my head, so to speak. Then I would go at my own work, never using a long word when I could find a short one to answer the same purpose; never using a Latin word when I could find a Saxon one to express the same meaning; never using two adjectives where one would do, or one at all when it could be avoided; never describing dress if I could help it; never using a French word unless impossible to find the same meaning in English, and never quoting bits of poetry unless really necessary. *John Strange Winter.*

"Mind, I don't hold this plan up to others. I worried through myself, fairly groping my way, and always keeping before me that I must never write anything even bordering on profanity. A sentence of Artemus Ward's puts that so well, 'I never stain my writings with profanity; in the first place it is indecent, and in the second it is not funny.' I could

John Strange Winter.

tell you a great deal of my early struggles for a name which I can hardly write, and there is so much which I know and feel which I cannot clearly express. It is such a difficult profession ours—there are so many little points which only practice teaches, and you don't know why they are there, and often not that they are there at all.

"I had written thus far when I was called away. And now I have come back again there seems no more to say, except that all the work in the world is no use without the little touch of divine genius, which is born, not made; and without the work, and care, and thought, the genius is like the talent hidden in a napkin."

Ernst Haeckel.

I may here interpolate the translation of a letter from one of the best-known contemporary German authors. ERNST HAECKEL, as a scientific naturalist, has made for himself a lasting reputation in the realm of comparative anatomy and zoology. The larger number of his long list of works have been written for the scientist, but the books which have made him so widely renowned as a Darwinian more

pronounced than Darwin himself are composed in a simple, straightforward style, well adapted for popular reading. "I much fear," he says, "that your estimate of my writings is placed too high, and that many critics would not agree with you. Since you are specially interested in my style, and wish to know what methods I use in my literary composition, I can only reply that an inborn talent favours me possibly, and that from early youth on I have wished to give my thoughts a clear and precise expression. Special literary education I have had none, nor have I bestowed any care on artistic composition. I have not even read much; mostly Goethe, Lessing, Humboldt, Schleider, Huxley and Darwin. I have always endeavoured to acknowledge nature as the first and best mistress." *Ernst Haeckel.*

Professor JOHN TYNDALL may also be quoted in this connection. He may surely be regarded not only as one of the foremost living men of science, but also as one of the clearest and most forcible writers of the day. Writing from Alp Lusgen, his summer home amid the Swiss mountains, he says: "Emerson has *Prof. Tyndall.*

Prof. Tyndall. said in one of his essays that there are methods in mathematics which are incommunicable, and it certainly would be a difficult, if not an impossible task for me to tell you how I reached the style of which you are kind enough to speak so favourably. To think clearly is the first requisite; and here, though even my friends think me rapid, I am in reality very slow. My next aim is to express clearly in writing what I think. But clearness is not, of itself, sufficient to make a style. And here we come to the really incommunicable part of the matter. A good ear, a sound judgment, and a thorough knowledge of English grammar—all contribute. But the turn of a sentence, and even the construction of a sentence, will sometimes flash upon the mind in a manner not to be described. I suppose I must have had a natural liking for a good style, for I remember, when very young, urging upon an equally youthful correspondent the necessity of paying attention to this subject. I suppose, prior to liking it I must have experienced the charm of a good style; and what I have called my natural liking simply consisted in being able to feel delight

in such a style when it came before me. I read Blair's lectures on Rhetoric before I left school, and found the work useful to me. I am here surrounded by Alpine snows, and a desultory letter is all I am able to send you." *Prof. Tyndall.*

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL, the author of "The Biglow Papers," a poet of world-wide celebrity, a prose writer of exquisite charm, is surely, for penetration, pungency, wit, for brilliant and incisive epigram, for dignified eloquence, the master of living American authors. "I am inclined to think," he writes, "that a man's style is born with him, and that a style modelled upon another's is apt to be none or worse. Of course I mean consciously modelled, for frequent commerce with the best writers is as essential as that with good society to give *tone*—perhaps is the only thing that will give it. If I have attained to any clearness of style, I think it is partly due to my having had to lecture twenty years as a professor at Harvard. It was always present to my consciousness that whatever I said must be understood at once by my hearers, or never. Out of this I, almost without knowing it, *James Russell Lowell.*

James Russell Lowell.

formulated the rule that every sentence must be clear in itself, and never too long to be carried, without risk of losing its balance, on a single breath of the speaker. If I have ever sinned against this rule, it has been in despite of my better conscience. I think, therefore, that it is always a good test of what one has written to read it to oneself in default of other, and, in my own case at least, less critical audience. I fear I have not contributed much to a fruitful discussion of the subject, but I have done what I could. You see that I have reversed the dictum of Horace:

> '*Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem*
> *Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.*'

Cato's advice, '*Cum bonis ambula,*' is all that one feels inclined to give."

Edmund Clarence Stedman.

Another American author, EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN, whose poems and essays are admirable models of restraint, moderation, flexibility, and finish, writes to say, "I am the more impressed the longer I live with the force of Buffon's saying. Yes, the style is indeed the man. When a young fellow consults me as to his mode of making a speech or

writing an article, I tell him the first thing is to have something to say, *i.e.*, something he must say or express, and then he will say it in his natural and special way; and his way forms his style, and the style is thus the man. Style is, like the style of other arts than literature, 'a means of expression' only. Still, fluency of expression, or its compactness, or happy originalities, all these are natural gifts, and often inherited. For my humble self, I inherited from my mother (a natural poet and critic) a knack of writing and speaking what I think, and as I think it. In youth I was reared in a Puritan New England family, with surroundings that seemed cold, barren, austere to a boy whose strongest passion was a love of beauty; but our New England households are not barren of books and mental pabulum. I read eagerly what few of our young people now read, rarely getting hold of trash or imitative, recent literature. Sunday was my reading-day *par excellence;* and as I was permitted to read nothing more 'secular' than Bunyan and Milton, I read those noble writers over and over again, and suppose that my style was insensibly affected by their

Edmund Clarence Stedman.

Edmund Clarence Stedman.

methods and vocabularies. My first *own* book of poetry was 'Scott's Poetical Works,' which I delighted in, the folklore 'notes' and all. Afterwards I became familiar with Byron, Moore, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and of course with our own Bryant, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Poe, &c. But my prose style owes most to familiarity with the Bible, Bunyan, Milton, Defoe, in early youth."

T. W. Higginson.

One of the most graceful and genial essayists of America, and a poet whose verse is marked by an exquisite grace and delicacy of expression, THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON, regards himself as an illustration of how a gift for literature may be transmitted and accumulated from one generation to another, and then developed into a life-long pursuit. Born amid a world of books and bookish men, he says, "I came to literature by heredity. The printer's ink in my blood is really 300 years old, my first American progenitor, Rev. Francis Higginson, of Salem, born in 1587, having come here in 1629 and printed a book, written in most racy and attractive style,—'New England's Plantation,'—

which is still reprinted. His son, Rev. John Higginson, was a profuse scribbler, and printed much. Then the habit skipped several generations, during which my progenitors in the male line were quiet town clerks, justices of the peace, &c.; but my grandfather, Stephen Higginson (member of Congress in 1783), was a vigorous pamphleteer, and my father wrote one or two pamphlets. My mother also (*née* Storrow, daughter of a captain in the British army) wrote several children's books, and my elder brother a small anti-slavery book. Then, as we lived in Cambridge, my father being Steward, now called Bursar, of Harvard University, I was always in a bookish atmosphere. In college I was the second-best writer in the class, though the youngest member; and I there had the inestimable guidance of Professor Edward Channing, brother of the Rev. Dr. W. E. Channing, who turned out more good writers than any half-dozen other rhetorical teachers in America, including Emerson, Holmes, Motley, Hale, Parkman, &c. So I came to writing naturally, and have always enjoyed it very much."

T. W. Higginson.

Julian Hawthorne.

JULIAN HAWTHORNE is the son of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Clothing the weird, fantastic, demoniac stories in which his imagination loved to revel in a style so sweet, natural, perspicuous, so easy even in its most curious felicities, so marked by originality and indescribable fascination, the father certainly remains unsurpassed by any other American author, past or present. The son is no unworthy follower in the steps of his sire. His passionate individuality and sterling characteristics as a writer place him decidedly above the average novelist. "As regards my early training," he says, "I can hardly tell whether I had any or not. I did not expect to be an author until some time after my first ventures were written and published. When I was a boy of twelve or thereabouts, I was interested in conchology, and used to write in little blank books minute descriptions of the shells which I collected. The usual boys' journals and letters to boy friends and others were part of my literary experience; and I suppose these were neither above nor below the average of such things. In school my 'compositions' were flat and perfunctory, and were

marked down pretty low. In college I wrote but one theme, and that was for a fellow-student, on the subject of Tennyson's 'Two Voices'—a poem with which I happened to be familiar. This solitary effort, for some reason or other, received the first prize. I was brought up on Spenser's 'Faërie Queene,' Scott's poems and novels, and my own father's works. Later I was a diligent reader of Tennyson. I believe I wrote some verses of a philosophico-erotic character. I read Macaulay, De Quincey, Emerson, and Carlyle; and I think the best proof that the reading was not in vain was the unflinching condemnation it caused me to pass on everything that I produced myself. I perceived that I knew nothing, and that years must pass before I could write anything worth printing. And though I have been in print for sixteen years, I often doubt whether that period has yet arrived. I have never been in love with my own work; but, on the other hand, I never believe that I am incapable of better work than I have ever done. Leisure and opportunity have been wanting. *Julian Hawthorne.*

"I am disposed to think that literary style

Julian Hawthorne.

is largely a matter of innate aptitude, and is fostered as much by the study of good authors as by personal efforts. Neither cause will produce a good style without the other, and both are in vain without natural taste and predilection. First know what is good, then learn to do it. The best writing is always the most spontaneous and easy, not only in appearance, but actually. Smoothness and elegance can be obtained by 'filing'; but the masters of style have no files; they are right the first time, by a sort of trained instinct and intuition. Of course I do not mean that any one can write well until after long and arduous apprenticeship; and, to mention an experience of my own, though I am far enough from being a master of style, one of my early novels was re-written seven times, simply as an exercise in putting what I wished to say in simple and compact form; and for several years I published nothing that had not been re-written twice or thrice. Latterly, however, I seldom alter a line or even a word of my first draft; but that is more from indifference than because I doubt that my work would not benefit from revision. I have a good deal to do,

and I do it rapidly. The other day I wrote a novel of 70,000 words in less than three weeks." *Julian Hawthorne.*

HJALMAR H. BOYESEN, my next contributor, the Norwegian poet and novelist, is an author whose books are characterised by literary and dramatic qualities of a high order, and have a considerable sale in the United States. Mr. Boyesen is one of the professors at Columbia College, New York. "I am not conscious," he says, "of having had any special training fitting me for my life-work as an author. In my eleventh year I became possessed with a desire to write, although the atmosphere in which I lived was anything but literary. It must have been an inherited impulse, possibly a case of atavism; and though it was discouraged by my grandfather, in whose house I was brought up, I took so much pleasure in the exercise of the talent which I was convinced that I possessed that no persuasion could induce me to give it up. My absorption in imaginary scenes and characters drew me away from my lessons and brought me no end of trouble; but I could no more help returning to this wonder- *H. H. Boyesen.*

H. H. Boyesen.

land of forbidden pleasure than I could prevent the exercise of any other natural function. There was, however, another side to my life, which, though it may seem irreconcilable with a literary bent of mind, really was an education for my future activity. I cannot give you any adequate idea of this in a letter, but if you will read a very good account of my boyhood in W. H. Rideing's 'Boyhood of American Authors,' you will see what I mean. My out-of-door life in the woods and on the fjords of Norway had more to do with fashioning my style, such as it is, than any other influence. I learned at an early age to keep my senses wide awake; and I soon learned to use for literary purposes the impressions which I unconsciously absorbed during my hunting and fishing expeditions.

"I think I was about fourteen years old when, after having worn out several tutors, I was sent to a Latin school in Germany. The instruction I received there was of a sterile and unsatisfactory kind, and I am unable to see that my literary instinct was in any way guided or fostered by my grammatical sufferings and futile struggles with Mading and Curtius.

I fear I was regarded as rather a stupid boy, because I rebelled against this discipline and never exerted myself to excel. But I presently began to explore the poets, Danish, German, English, on my own account, and derived from the reading of them an indescribable delight. It is a curious fact that a word in a foreign language, when felicitously used, often impresses us more than the corresponding word in our mother tongue. The latter may have its beauty spoiled by too much use; while the foreign word sometimes presents the idea in all its freshness and vigour. At all events, some such experience was mine when I first began to read Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley, and Tennyson. They enriched my vocabulary, though I am not aware that they in any way fashioned my style. My first book, which was written when I was twenty-two years old, 'Gunnar, a Tale of Norse Life,' was strongly influenced by Björnson, and the style shows traces everywhere of this influence. But this instinct of imitation asserts itself in young writers as in young birds; before they find their own voices they imitate the voices of other singers.

H. H. Boyesen.

H. H. Boyesen.

"My conclusion is that the gift of style is largely inherited and instinctive. There is not a gift of my mental equipment which has given me so pure a pleasure as the sense of fragrance and colour in words—I might almost say the individuality of words. It is very possible that like any other gift it is capable of being trained and rightly directed. But in my case I am incapable of deciding what influences impelled me in the direction which I have taken. I never had a teacher who wrote a good style himself, or knew what style meant. And the Greek and Latin classics, some of which are models of a clear and vigorous style, are usually taught in a crude and pedantic manner, without a glimmering of literary sense or intelligence. It is in this respect to-day, as it was in my childhood."

For my own part I do not of course question the fact of special endowment insisted upon or referred to by the authors quoted above. The fact is patent. "No manipulation will take the place of the fervour of high feeling, and the faith which connects a writer with powers beyond him, and yet working through him,"

says Professor DOWDEN; while, in the same letter, he instances a fine saying by Goethe, "I can only gather wood and lay it on the altar; the fire must descend from heaven." Still, I cannot but feel that the common idea about genius and natural gift is most pernicious. It has a too serious tendency to set up insurmountable barriers to the masses of men, while they sit down in the conviction that they are nothing and effort is useless. Who knows what his gifts are until he tests them? I am distinctly of opinion that what is termed genius is largely intensity of feeling, emotion, thought, activity; that true greatness springs from culture, and that high endeavours are the secret of glad success. There are indeed wide differences between men; but the secret of those differences lies far less in special gift vouchsafed to one and withheld from another, than in the differing degree in which men use or fail to use those elements of human greatness which lie within the grasp of all. Genius is energy quite as much as insight; and insight is as much dependent upon tireless activity as upon Divine gift. Power of attention, forceful habits of industry, wisdom in seeing and

promptitude in seizing opportunity, patient perseverance, courage and hopefulness under difficulty and disappointment—certain am I these are the forces that win.

I can give no better expression to my own thought and feeling upon this question than by resuming the quotations from favourite authors, permitting them to speak for me.

A. J. C. Hare.

"I think any one may attain a good style of composition," writes the accomplished AUGUSTUS J. C. HARE, whose books are certainly peerless in the class of literature to which they belong. "It chiefly comes from the ear—noticing what people say, their turns of expression, &c. But nothing can be written in an *interesting* way by a person who does not feel with his subject. I know myself that by far my best work is to be found in 'Days near Rome'—the chapters on Ostia, Tivoli, Orvieto, &c. It was because the places were so exceedingly dear to me that I was able to write of them so as, I hope, to help others to imagine them." Speaking of his own experience, Mr. Hare says: "As a child I always lived with those who had a very strict idea of what good

English should be, and of careful diction; above all, of careful instruction in reading aloud. My dear old grandmother would often make me repeat the single line, 'The quality of mercy is not strained,' a hundred times, till I could give exactly the right inflection, her delicate ear detecting the slightest fault; and I was taught never to write anything which did not 'read well aloud'—this being the easiest criterion of its being well written. As I grew older, I lived much with my cousin, Arthur Stanley, afterwards Dean of Westminster, and his amusing stories, and looking over, or collecting and looking out materials for his lectures at Oxford, gave me a great impulse, just after my own college course was finished. But perhaps what was more useful still was, that when I was (unaccountably) left for two and a half years with a private tutor near Bath, who utterly and systematically neglected me, I united with one of my companions in writing a sort of magazine (MS.), which was read aloud every fortnight for the benefit and amusement of the rest, and the composition of which was a real advantage in the facility it made habitual."

A. J. C. Hare.

Samuel Smiles.

SAMUEL SMILES, the genial and graceful author of "Self Help," and a long list of books noted for their solid sense and robust sentiment, containing a vast storehouse of incident and vivid illustration, and written in the clear, finished, and embellished style of which he is so excellent a master, thinks we may go too far in speaking of style in composition as a gift and not an art. He says, "The style of Kant, Bentham, and Carlyle are execrable; and yet the writings of these men will live much longer than those of Tupper and Hepworth Dixon, who were proud of their styles. | The great writer will live by his matter and not by his manner. | The curse of pedantry was on Johnson's magniloquent style. You could scarcely feel the beatings of his heart through it. His companion, Goldsmith, thought nothing of his style, and yet his 'Vicar of Wakefield' will be read when Johnson's 'Rasselas' has been forgotten. The Doctor will be remembered in Boswell, who had no style at all. What Sydney Smith has said is true: 'Every style is good that is not tiresome.' No doubt the style of a writer is a faithful representation of his mind; if he

would write in a clear style, he must see and think clearly; if he would write in a noble style, he must possess a noble soul. Fontenelle said that in writing he always endeavoured to understand himself. The art of composition, written or oral, can only be acquired by practice. No man is the lord of anything till he communicates his thoughts to others. At the same time the readiest in composition are those who write the most. Another word: Madame de Gasparin said, 'The reader is the true author. Every book is, in fact, a journey—a journey in which we find little more than we ourselves bring: the richly provided richly require.'" *Samuel Smiles.*

Of himself Dr. Smiles says, "I never studied the art of composition. I read a multitude of the best books, and from that I suppose I learnt to compose. I received, when young, a fair education; then I went to a university and studied medicine. Then, when I settled in practice, I gave lectures on chemistry, physiology, &c. This, no doubt, must have helped me. I wrote a book at twenty-five, but it failed. Perhaps it paid its expenses. I gave up medicine because I was too young to

Samuel Smiles.

be employed by paying people. I became the editor of a weekly newspaper for six or seven years, and then I have no doubt my style was formed, because I wrote from four to five columns weekly. But I always continued to read books famous for their style. I think that the example of Franklin was excellent, to read over a paper in *The Spectator* thoroughly, and then try to put it in language of his own. But every one will have his own style and art of composition. I think the words of the Bible are the best and most straightforward. Addison, Hume, and Green ('History of England'), Goldsmith ('Vicar of Wakefield'), and Bacon's essays, are excellent. Carlyle has made a style of his own, mostly formed from the German of Richter. Every one also has his favourite poet. Mine is Wordsworth."

Cuthbert Bede.

CUTHBERT BEDE is the *nom de guerre* under which the Rev. Edward Bradley publishes his admirably humorous books. The author of "Verdant Green" evidently believes that genius is nothing but common-place, honest, hard work. "As early as I can remember," he says, "I used to scribble prose and verse

(or prose and *worse*, as Douglas Jerrold said) and illustrate my MS. by my own pen-and-ink designs. I was an omnivorous reader, and I conclude that I assimilated what seemed best in the style of the various authors, and that I profited thereby when I came to write my own compositions. There is nothing like constant practice, in composition as in other matters. A little thought soon tells you what is the best word to use in the construction of a sentence, and in what way that sentence should be composed. I have written so very much, at high pressure, for newspapers, that I had no time to prepare a rough copy of my MS. and then to digest and re-cast it; so that I had to discipline myself to be able to write straight away, without preparatory aids. And I may here advise any of your readers who write for the press or periodicals to take special pains over the mechanism of their work —not to be above being careful in dotting their *i*'s and crossing their *t*'s, in forming their letters legibly, avoiding all abbreviations, carefully placing their commas, semi-colons, and full stops in the proper places, and sending in a clearly written manuscript. It will stand a

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far better chance of being looked at and accepted than if it were badly, illegibly, and slovenly written: and, if accepted, the printer will set it up more readily, and as there will be fewer mistakes in the proof to be corrected the cost of production will be lessened.

"When I was a boy, at the Kidderminster Grammar School, I was a member of the then existent 'Athenæum,' where a manuscript magazine was produced monthly. I possess three large volumes, profusely illustrated by my own designs, and containing all varieties of prose and verse articles, by myself, contributed thereto under at least a dozen pseudonyms. One of these stories, penned when I was a boy, I afterwards re-wrote, and it was published by Bentley in his half-crown series under the title of 'Nearer and Dearer,' starting with a sale of 15,000 copies. Other productions of my boyhood have also seen the change into print. When I went to University College, Durham, I made my first appearance (as a poet) in 'Bentley's Miscellany,' a half-crown magazine in which Dickens produced his 'Oliver Twist.' I signed my poems 'Cuthbert Bede,' the two patron saints of Durham. This was in 1846,

when I was nineteen years of age. Since then my pen has been constantly practised in all kinds of work, from grave to gay, from lively to severe. I have always striven to be as clear and lucid as possible, and to convey to my readers what I had to say in an easy and plain way, without circumlocution and ambiguity. I do that in my sermons and clerical addresses quite as much as in light and more frivolous compositions. *Cuthbert Bede.*

"Composition cannot begin too early. When my sons were very small boys I used to make them write a composition every week. They chose their own subjects, and treated them in their own fashion; and they read them to us on a certain night in the week, which was called our 'Penny Reading Night.' It was very great fun, and did them much good. Of my two surviving sons, the elder, Cuthbert, is on the staff of 'Fore's Sporting Notes,' a 2s. quarterly, both as an author and artist; and my younger son, Harry, was ordained in June last* to be one of the curates to Canon Erskine Clarke, at Battersea. I believe that their early efforts in

* June, 1888.

Cuthbert Bede.

composition have been of use to them in after-life.

"Get good models of style, such as Addison, Macaulay, Thackeray, and many others, not forgetting Cowper the poet and also his delightful letters; study the best authors, and practise, practise, practise! Nothing can be well done without infinite pains and trouble over minutiæ. For my own part I don't believe in heaven-born geniuses, unless they supplement their genius with the healthy drudgery of daily work. Anthony Trollope told me that the best aid to genius was a bit of cobbler's wax to fasten yourself to your stool until you had accomplished your allotted task."

Perhaps I cannot, in bringing this long chapter to a close, do my reader a better service than by placing before him the opinion and advice of an author whose literary culture and full mastery of the art of writing, whose clear analysis of character and insight into human nature, have made him one of the most successful contemporary novel-writers of our country.

GEORGE MACDONALD is not simply a novelist, but also a poet of a high order, and a preacher and lecturer whose spoken style is remarkable for its transparency, its energy, its elegance. "If a man has anything to say," writes Dr. Macdonald, "he will manage to say it; if he has nothing to communicate, there is no reason why he should have a good style, any more than why he should have a good purse without any money, or a good scabbard without any sword. For my part I always scorned the very idea of forming a style. Every true man with anything to say has a style of his own, which, for its development, requires only common sense. In the first place, he must see that he has said what he means; in the next, that he has not said it so that it may be mistaken for what he does not mean. The mere moving of a word to another place may help to prevent such mistake. Then he must remove what is superfluous, what is unnecessary or unhelpful to the understanding of his meaning. He must remove whatever obscures or dulls the meaning, and makes it necessary to search for what might have been plainly understood at once. All this implies a combination of writer

George Macdonald.

George Macdonald.

and critic, not often found. Whatever, in a word, seems to the writer himself objectionable, either in regard to sense or sound, he must rigorously remove. He must use no phrase because it sounds fine, and no imagined ornament which does not contribute to the sense or the feeling of what he writes.

"But, first of all, he ought to make a good acquaintance with grammar, the rarity of which possession is incredible to any but the man who is precise in his logical use of words. There are very few men who can be depended on for writing a sentence grammatically perfect. And, alas! English is scarcely taught in England! I have not time to write on a subject which is not my business, but a means to other ends. The thing is summed in this: A good style is one that not merely says, but *conveys* what the writer means; and to gain it, a man must continually endeavour to convey what he means, and never to show himself off. The mere endeavour to gain the reputation of a good writer is contemptible. I would say to any one whose heart burned within him, write freely what you feel, and then correct rigorously. The truth must give you your

material and utterance; and then you must get rid of the faults that would interfere with the entrance of your utterance into the minds of those who may read. The effort after style ought to be but a removing of faults. Say, and then say right." *George Macdonald.*

METHODS: CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS.

METHODS: CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS.

MANY of our best authors have attained their present power and influence through experiences, or by modes of culture, that can scarcely be described in words. There is an unconscious as well as a conscious training. Education, in the highest sense and for the highest services of the world, is not a matter of schools and teachers, text-books and tasks. The teacher cannot make the scholar; because the largest part of a man's culture is in the discipline of himself, in the atmosphere of thought and feeling by which he surrounds his soul. But while our great writers can give so little information as to how they came by their present remarkable facility in the art of putting noble thought into noble speech, they are practically unanimous in bearing testimony to the fact, that whatever they are, or whatever they have been enabled

to accomplish, they owe to long years of earnest and persevering labour. They have never learned without study; they have never received knowledge as the mind receives dreams; they have never given to the world a helpful and inspiring book that has not been the outcome of serious thought, of laborious research, and of painstaking effort. It is the unity in men of desire, purpose, industry, that gives them mastery in the world.

Robert Browning.

ROBERT BROWNING must be permitted in this chapter to speak to us first. Does he not stand among all living, English-speaking poets the greatest creative artist? Happily to-day the study of his writings is neither a craze nor a fashion, it is the homage of human nature to a prophet and a seer. Impressed with the nobility and greatness of the poet's conceptions of life and of men, people are awaking to the fact that Browning has a definite message of faith and hope to this age. Referring to his own experience as an author, he writes, "All I can say is this much, and very little, that, by the indulgence of my father and mother, I was allowed to live my own life and choose my

Robert Browning.

own course in it; which having been the same from the beginning to the end, necessitated a permission to read nearly all sorts of books in a well-stocked but very miscellaneous library. I had no other direction than my parents' taste for whatever was highest and best in literature; but I found out for myself many forgotten fields which proved the richest of pastures; and, so far as a preference of a particular 'style' is concerned, I believe mine was just the same at first as at last. I cannot name any one author who exclusively influenced me in that respect—as to the fittest expression of thought—but thought itself had many impulsions from very various sources, a matter not to your present purpose. I repeat this is very little to say, but all in my power, and it is heartily at your service, if not as of any value, at least as a proof that I gratefully feel your kindness."

William Morris.

WILLIAM MORRIS is perhaps far more widely known as one of the most earnest and cultured leaders of Socialism than as one of the most exquisite of our living poets. Indeed, his books have all too limited a circle of readers;

William Morris.

their intrinsic beauty and worth ought to secure them a place in the home of every cultured man. His "Earthly Paradise," his "Jason," and other noble poems are delightful for their elegance and smoothness of diction, the purity of their English, and the musicalness of their metre. "I can't say that I ever had any system," he writes. "As a young child I was a greedy reader of every book I could come across. I am not town-bred, and was happy enough to spend the greater part of my life in the open air as a boy—Epping Forest at home; the Marlborough countryside (one of the most interesting in England) at school. I was at Oxford before it was so much spoiled as it has been since by the sordid blackguards of 'Dons' who pretend to educate young people there. I had the sense to practically refuse to learn anything I didn't like, and also, practically, nobody attempted to teach me anything. In short I had leisure, pleasure, good-health, and was the son of a well-to-do man. These were my advantages. My disadvantages were in myself, and not around me, I think. I fear 'tis little use putting such an example before your young

men, who probably will have to lay their noses to the grindstone at a very early stage of their career. If I may venture to advise you as to what to advise them, it would be that you should warn them off art and literature as *professions*, as bread-winning work, most emphatically. If *I* were advising them, I should advise them to learn as soon as possible the sad fact that they are slaves, whatever their position may be, so that they might turn the whole of their energies towards winning freedom, if not for themselves, yet for the children they will beget. Under such conditions art and literature are not worth consideration." *William Morris.*

"To tell the truth, I do not know how I have formed my style," says ALFRED AUSTIN, a lyric and dramatic poet of genuine power. "It seems to me to have grown and altered with myself. But I did, when young, read copiously of the best authors, always preferring those, whether in a dead or living language, who seemed to have a respect for form and harmony. I was never satisfied with the separation of the two. The greatest writers are *Alfred Austin.*

Alfred Austin. often not the best teachers; but, save in this respect, no rule can be laid down. Try to think clearly, and in time clearness of expression ought to follow. But beyond rudimentary rules for rudimentary composition, I doubt if instruction can be given."

Amelia E. Barr. AMELIA E. BARR is an American author, widely known and read in England, who has sent out into the world quite a long list of agreeable and artistic tales. All her writings are marked by a religious spirit; but they have not a trace of bitterness, sectarianism or maudlin sentiment. They are as strong as they are sweet. Their composition is easy and flowing, pithy and sparkling in dialogue, and decidedly clever in descriptive power. "I was early familiar with books," she writes, "far beyond the supposed capacity of my years. At that time they seemed to make little impression upon me, yet I believe their stately sentences trained my ear to a nice sense of harmonious composition. The books I read aloud were chiefly old divines, and the works of Keble, Newman, Hall, Henry, &c. The education which has, however, made me a

writer has been a living one. I have not only read much, I have seen much, and enjoyed much, and, above all, I have sorrowed much. God has put into my hands every cup of life, sweet and bitter, and the bitter has often become sweet, and the sweet bitter. My own firm conviction is that no education can make a writer. The heart must be hot behind the pen. Out of the abundance of life and its manifold experiences comes the power to touch life. Before I lifted the pen I had been half over the world. I had been a happy wife seventeen years. I had nursed nine sons and daughters. I had drunk of the widow's bitter cup. I had buried all my children but three. I had passed through a great war; been on the frontiers of civilised life in Texas for ten years; as the Scotch say, 'I had seen humanity in a' its variorums.' After that I had fifteen years' apprenticeship on the press of New York, writing editorials upon every conceivable subject, often at a few minutes' notice, acquiring in this way rapid thought and rapid expression. Of course, in the present state of general education, there are few young people who could not write at least one

Amelia E. Barr.

Amelia E. Barr.

readable book, but the proof of genius lies in continuity.

"I have no methods that are regular enough to describe. My style is the gradual growth of years of literary labour (20 years), and I may add of real not affected feeling. I put *myself*, my experiences, my observations, my heart and soul into my work. I press my soul upon the white paper. The writer who does this may have any style, he or she will find the hearts of their readers. You will see, then, that writing a book involves, not a waste, but a great expenditure of vital force. Yet I can assure you I have written the last lines of most of my stories with tears. The characters of my own creation had become dear to me. I could not bear to bid them good-bye and send them away from me into the wide world. I suppose I shall fall somewhat in your opinion when I tell you that rules of composition have so little to do with my work that I do not even know the parts of speech, and grammar would be as strange as Greek to me.

"I write early in the day. I begin work almost as soon as it is light enough for me to see. I work until noon. Then I am still

Southern enough to enjoy a *siesta*, after which I drive, or see callers, or perhaps do two or three hours' copying. I use the typewriter in all finished work—Remington's No. 2—for I have four copies to make of each book, one for my American publisher, one for Clarke and Co., of London, my English publishers, one for an American serial, and one for an English serial. I live as close as I can to God, and as far away from the world as possible. My home stands on a spur of Storm King Mountain; and as I write to you I lift my eyes and see the Hudson River for forty miles of its course, and an enormous outlook of lovely country with the Catskills Mountains bounding my view sixty miles away. I have counted already twenty-six different kinds of birds on my place, and they are singing and chattering and building all around me. Yet I am at least 1,400 feet above the river." *Amelia E. Barr.*

General LEW. WALLACE, the author of that noble book, "Ben Hur: a Story of the Christ," gives in a few words an epitome of a romantic life. "If there is excellence in my composition, set it down, first of all things and last, to the *General Wallace.*

General Wallace. fact that I have no method. Modes of expression in writing, like modes of expression in speech, are referable purely to feeling, not studied, but of the moment. When I was a boy I ran wild in the great woods of my native State. I hunted, fished, went alone, slept with my dog, was happy, and came out with a constitution. My name was Idleness, except that I read—every moment that I was still I was reading. Fifteen years my father paid my tuition bills regularly, but I did not go to school. He started me in college, but I ran away, and was expelled. Teachers would have nothing to do with me. In short, my education, such as it is, is due to my father's library. The book that had most to do with influencing me was 'Plutarch's Lives'; and now, at the age of sixty,* when my will grows drowsy and my ambition begins to halt, I take to that book, and am well at once."

E. S. Phelps. "I have no methods in literary work," says ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS, the gifted author of "Gates Ajar." "I never gave any *special* study to the formation of style in youth,

* 1887.

beyond that which comes from a cultivated home and a good education. My father and mother were both literary people of a fine order. My mother died when I was a child, but my father inspired me with an early taste for good reading. So far as the formation of my own style goes, it is the result of downright hard work. This, and the experience of life, have been my chief teachers." *E. S. Phelps.*

"I cannot say," writes BRET HARTE, who wields a magic pen, that interests and delights the reader from first to last, "of my own knowledge, how I formed my style. If, as M. de Buffon believed, 'the style is the man,' I am, of course, the last person you would apply to for that information. It may assist you to know, however, that I was very young when I first began to write for the press; and as a very young and needy editor, I learned to contrive the composition of the editorial with the setting of its type; and, it is possible, that to save my fingers mechanical drudgery somewhat condensed my style. This was in a country where people lived by observation rather than tradition, and the routine was not *Bret Harte.*

Bret Harte. without a certain chastening effect on both writer and reader."

Rhoda Broughton. RHODA BROUGHTON, the author of many widely-read novels, confesses, "I have no method. I began to write merely from instinct, feeling the wish to say what was in my head. I am far from recommending this mode of composition, as it has led me into much slipshod writing; but it never occurred to me consciously to form a style. The words were and are only the vehicles for my thoughts. I fear I can be, therefore, of no use to you, unless it be as a warning."

John Payne. JOHN PAYNE, translator of the "Arabian Nights" for the Villon Society, the author of several books of poetry that have attained deserved distinction for their polish of style, and their beauty and refinement of thought, finds it difficult to give any statement as to his own method of literary work, for the simple reason that his mode of original production, both in verse and prose, has been curiously inconsistent, and it is, indeed, only by an *a posteriori* process that he can trace any

of the influences that affected it. "My verse in particular," he says, "has never, except in a very few isolated instances, been written in cold blood; ideas and subjects have lain dormant in my brain for months, and even years, till some unexplained influence has played the part of Vulcan's hammer, and loosed the imprisoned Minerva, ready armed; and then there is no question of style or method, the pen can hardly move fast enough for the imprisoned flood of verse. The poem is committed to paper as in a dream, and I am surprised when I awake to find what I have done. I cannot, therefore, tell you anything about my method of labour as regards style, simply because labour there is practically none, correction being almost always only a matter of rectifying the mechanical slips of the pen consequent upon the furious haste with which the poem is committed to paper. I know there are far better poets than myself, who build up their verse with infinite labour. Rossetti was one of the kind. This I could never do, but must wait till the fit took me, whether I would or no. In the matter of original prose I am little better; such studies

John Payne.

John Payne.

as the essays upon Villon and the 'Arabian Nights,' though of course prepared by much research and special reading, were written, that is to say, committed to paper, well-nigh as lyrically as my verse, that is, in a fit of possession almost as unconscious of labour and of preoccupation as to style. Any inquiry, accordingly, into the mechanism of my methods of production can hardly be compared to anything more exact than an attempt to analyse the influences which have brought about the flowering of a primrose; but by the *a posteriori* process, of which I have already spoken, I may, perhaps, be able to give a few particulars as to the things which I suppose, rather than know, to have had a fertilising influence upon my mind in the matter of style.

"I had no special training in this respect; indeed, I may say the contrary was the case, I having been engaged in business from the age (fourteen) of leaving school, and having been brought up by parents bitterly hostile to literature. Omnivorous reading, a very early delight in word-analysis, which made, even at nine or ten, the dictionary as pleasant as a novel to me, and an instinctive pleasure in

language-learning, which was a good deal checked by circumstances till about nineteen: to these things, as far as to anything beyond what natural gift I may have, I attribute what you indulgently describe as my mastery over the English tongue. From my own experience I cannot recommend to a young man wishing to form for himself 'a forcible and interesting style of expression' (in so far, that is, as it is possible to acquire such a gift, and I confess that, for my own part, I doubt the possibility of its *acquisition*, though I know it can, when existing in a rudimentary form, be cultivated and developed,—is it not written, in very earnest jest, by the wisest of our kind, 'To be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune, but to read and write come by nature'?) a better course than the intimate study and analysis of and translation from other languages than his own. This, he will find, will not only enlarge his vocabulary beyond belief, but will familiarise him with many and various ways of expressing familiar ideas; and this gives him command of the most urgent requisites of style—the avoidance of repetition and the power or means of expressing the eternal

John Payne.

John Payne.

common-places which form the basis of literature and life in a new, and, therefore, a striking manner. It is only of late years that I have begun to see clearly the influence which my early instinctive studies of language and word-form have had upon my power of literary expression, and it is now evident to me that they were all to the greater glory, as far as I was concerned, of our beloved and most magnificent English tongue, to wit, that the final cause of all the language-learning and philological training I have gone through, has been to increase my knowledge and refine my power of handling my own language. That this should be the case I am well content, and I could wish no better epitaph upon my grave than '*Linguam Anglicam Amavit.*'" That such facility in the use of the pen can only be the outcome of great and continuous intellectual discipline is abundantly evidenced by what Mr. Payne has said in the above letter. How serious must have been his mental culture in early life may be inferred from a fact stated in the postscript to this letter, "Dante's whole work I translated into verse before I was twenty, and I feel that his influence tended to

make me seek that severity of chastened expression which is necessary to correct over-richness of style." *John Payne.*

Two somewhat uncommon experiences may be of interest, one by an English novelist, the other by an American. Both authors are types of the same school, certainly clever, but given to a realism somewhat carried to excess.

GEORGE MOORE writes as follows: "It is of course impossible to say in a letter what I have said in a volume—'Confessions of a Young Man'—and I am writing fifty pages for the French edition, so incomplete does the book still seem to me. Yet I have something to say which you may be able to make use of. I do not believe that any one who ever succeeded in writing a book ever experienced the same difficulties in composition as I did. When I was five-and-twenty I could not distinguish between a verb and a noun, and until a few years ago I could not punctuate a sentence. This suggests idiocy; but I was never stupid, although I could not learn; I simply could not write consecutive sentences. For many years I had to pick out and strive to put together the fragments *George Moore.*

George Moore.

of sentences with which I covered reams of paper. My father thought I was deficient in intelligence because I could not learn to spell. I have never succeeded in learning to spell. I am entirely opposed to education as it is at present understood. I would let the boy learn Latin who wanted to; I would allow the boy who wanted to learn French to learn French. Were I a schoolmaster I should study the natural tastes of the boys, and try to develop them. An educational course seems to me to be folly. You ask if I gave myself any special training—I answer, None whatever. I read all that took my fancy, and nothing that did not take my fancy. For instance, I scarcely know anything of Shakespeare, and I know his contemporaries thoroughly. I cannot tell you why I insisted on reading Fletcher and Marlowe, unless it was to oppose those who endeavoured to lead me. I always had a good memory, and I remembered all odd words and phrases. I strove to use them afterwards, and I imitated the style of the author I was reading. French literature had a great effect upon me, and I read here and there and everywhere, picking up something everywhere, and never learning

anything thoroughly. I was inclined towards desultory reading, and I have gratified my inclinations to the top of my bent. It is impossible to give any one any idea of what were my difficulties in forming sentences; but I had something to say, and sought for the means of saying it, blindly, instinctively. I still experience great difficulty in disentangling my thoughts." *George Moore.*

The American novelist referred to has his home in one of the distant Western States of America. E. W. HOWE is the author of several weird stories, sombre and tragic in tone, that have given him a reputation "as the strongest man in fiction that the great West has produced." "I have had no literary training at all," he says. "When I was twelve years old I became an apprentice in a country newspaper office, and have been steadily engaged in that calling ever since, becoming an editor and publisher when I was sixteen or seventeen years old. The paper I first edited and published was in Golden, Colorado, a small affair, appearing weekly. I have been a publisher and editor from that time. I am now *E. W. Howe.*

E. W. Howe.

thirty-three.* I regret to say that I never studied a grammar in my life, and barely passed the multiplication table in arithmetic. The only training I ever had was in trying to please a small constituency as editor. I suppose every man who writes at all has an ambition to write a book; I know of no other reason why I tried it. I have no method. If I ever had, I change it every month. Usually I note down whatever occurs to me in the book way on the backs of envelopes I find in my pockets, and these notes I transfer to paper at home. For months at the time I write only for the newspaper which I edit. At other times I write late at night on the story in hand for several weeks in succession. I dislike it, because I do not sleep well after working at night; whatever I have been doing keeps running in my head. I have no literary acquaintances, although very many prominent authors have written me. I have read but little, and many of the famous books I do not know. I have always lived in the extreme West, where there are no literary people, and no literary atmosphere. I have met Mr. Aldrich and Mr. Stedman personally; Mr. Howells and Mr.

* 1887.

Clemens have been very kind to me, but I have never seen them. Living in England, you cannot imagine how desolate, from a literary standpoint, my surroundings have always been. Ever since I can remember I have been so busy that I have actually had no time to devote to anything save the business in which I am engaged. The book now in hand, which is to be known as 'A Man Story,' has been bothering me more than a year. I believe I could write it all in three months if I were rid of my newspaper work. I dislike to work at it, because I always imagine I could do so very much better were I not tired out before commencing. I have only read one author thoroughly—Dickens. In my opinion, he was the only man who ever lived that could write a complete story in every particular. I have occasionally found foolish fault with other writers, but it seems to me that his 'Great Expectations' is absolutely without a flaw, although it is not considered his greatest book. A citizen of this town knew him personally. I have great veneration for a man who has had such an honour. More than anything else, I should like to read a life of Dickens written by himself."

E. W. Howe.

M. O. W. Oliphant

MARGARET O. W. OLIPHANT has won an enviable reputation in the world of letters as a judicious biographer, a charming novelist, and a general writer of strong individuality. It is not easy to say wherein consists the unmistakable touch of genius in her work, but it is undoubtedly there. She always seems to strike the right vein, and to use the right words. Her composition is at all times vigorous, and never obscure. "I have nothing to tell you that can be of any use," she says. "I began to write at a very early age, and without either preparation or, indeed, consciousness that my writing would ever come to anything, and got into print, a little to my own astonishment and rather to the amusement of my family, who had treated my scribbling as if it had been the fancy work which was then supposed to be a girl's natural occupation, before I was twenty-one. I fear that a literary beginning so accidental and unprepared would not be at all edifying to your readers. The only thing I can say for myself is, that from my earliest days I read everything I could lay my hands on, which, I think, is not a bad training."

CHARLOTTE MARY YONGE, the author of "The Heir of Redclyffe," a prolific writer of history, biography, and romance, says of herself: "My training was chiefly unconscious. My father had the greatest dislike to slip-slop language and bad grammar, in conversation or writing, and always corrected it. When I began to write for publication, he picked every sentence to pieces, and turned it about, so that the story in hand lost all spirit, and I could not go on with it at the time; but after I gained more facility I returned to it, and the corrections had been a great education. I do not think he cared for style as much as for good grammar; and if that is *really* observed, style makes itself individual. The 'Heir of Redclyffe' was the last book of mine that had his revision. Since that I have observed and learnt, by my own mistakes and criticisms of them, *i.e.*, such things as that pronouns must start from a nominative antecedent, and that two pronouns of the same gender, applying to different persons in the same sentence, only make confusion. Also that every sentence must have a verb, &c. Of course, every student knows this, but young ladies do not." *C. M. Yonge.*

Vernon Lee.

Miss PAGET, who writes under the *nom de guerre* of VERNON LEE, confesses to having but few theories about style, though she has always wished, but in vain, to elicit the literary experiences of others. She says, "I fancy that the modes of work and the modes of training are very various; as to the latter, I imagine English writers consider them as unnecessary in most cases. The great object of a writer, it seems to me, should be to attain to such perfection of mechanism as to express all his ideas at once, without hesitation, and with the smallest possible need of correction. This is what we ask of a pianist, a singer, a painter. Pray understand that I refer to the actual writing, to the construction of sentences and paragraphs, not to composition in the sense of co-ordinating a book, or even a chapter. That must necessarily, I think, demand much planning, trying and altering. To attain such mastery over the mere words of sentences, I should recommend the young writer to write incessantly, on every subject, without any view to publication. Any thought, impression, or image, anything that can be written, should be written, and

written as rapidly and unhesitatingly as possible. The development of a critical sense, necessary to check the superabundance due to this practice, is a separate matter. I conceive that a diligent study of our eighteenth-century writers would be a most useful negative practice. Their grammar is often dubious, but their construction is usually uncommonly clear, owing to their being satisfied to express but little; and although their style is, I think, quite inadequate to our more complex, modern requirements, it is, for that very reason, a most useful corrective to the tendencies which modern requirements are likely to produce. I am conscious of having derived much profit from an eighteenth-century treatise—Blair's 'Rhetoric.'" *Vernon Lee.*

GEORGE GISSING is one of the later recruits to the ranks of our romancists, an author of considerable promise, whose keenness of insight, mental acuteness, and literary instinct lead us to expect good results from his facile pen. "Only last night," he writes, "as I was gossiping with a friend, we fell, oddly enough, on this very subject, and probed each other's *George Gissing.*

George Gissing.

memories in the endeavour to find out when, and under what circumstances, we had first become conscious—conscious in the strict sense of the word—of style in literature. Our results were of the vaguest, and I much fear that anything I can now write will be little more to the purpose. For my own part, I believe that many men who write good, nervous, lucid English have never troubled themselves to inquire by what process they attained this end. A sound education, active brains, and the taste for what is sterling in literature—these things have sufficed to make them in practice good turners of sentences, and the bent of their minds has never led them to predetermined study of models. My own attempts at authorship, on the other hand, have had the result of making me constantly search, compare, and strive in the matter of style: I would that the issue were more correspondent with the thought I have given to such things. When I first began to write for the press I understood myself as little as I did the great writers to whom my eyes were directed. A young poet, we know, is wont to model his verse, often quite con-

sciously, on that of the man he admires; a young writer of prose may imitate in subject, in cast of thought, but is very seldom capable of producing an echo of another's periods. I believe I liked what was good (of course I speak of form merely), but I yet lacked that experience in composition without which, in my belief, it is as difficult to form judgments regarding literary style as it is for a layman to criticise a painter's technique. And here, indeed, is the one little bit of solid information my letter will supply. To my teachers at school and college I owe the habit of study; the results of study, as far as they concern this matter of which we are speaking, assuredly I owe to no one but myself. *George Gissing.*

"I believe there are persons extant who undertake to instruct young men in the art of journalistic composition. Without irony, it would interest me much to be present at such a lesson. Does the teacher select a leading article from, say, *The Daily Telegraph*, and begin: 'Come now, let us note the artifices of style whereby this writer recommends himself to the attention of the public'? Well, if a man of ripe intelligence could have taken me

George Gissing.

at the age of twenty, and have read with me suitable portions of Sir Thomas Browne, of Jeremy Taylor, of Milton's prose, of Steele, De Quincey, Landor, Ruskin—to make a rough list of names—that, I think, would have been a special training valuable beyond expression. Nothing of the kind fell to my lot; it can fall to the lot of very few. Such teaching would be the sequel to that youthful essay-writing which trains one in grammatical accuracy. Lacking this aid, I have, to repeat myself, little by little, worked towards an appreciation of style in others, and to some measure of self-criticism. And this work I trust will continue throughout my life; I feel myself as yet but an apprentice.

"You know, of course, the little volume of selections from Landor, in the 'Golden Treasury' series. Could a young man whose thoughts are running on style do better than wear the book out with carrying it in his side pocket, that he might ponder its exquisite passages hour by hour? Or again, there will be few of your readers who are not familiar with 'Shirley' and 'Villette'; but have they yet learnt to *read* Charlotte Brontë?

George Gissing.

There are pages in both these works of hers which, with respect to literary art, will repay the most careful study; she is admirable in the selection of words and the linking of sentences. She did not know Latin, yet I recall many instances in which the wonderful choice of an uncommon word proved that she *felt* its meaning in the tongue from which it is derived. One is in her description of 'Vashti.' 'Royally, imperially, *incedingly* upborne,' she says. There is genius in that transference of *Incedo regina deûm.*"

Mark Twain.

MARK TWAIN is the *nom de guerre* of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, the great American humourist, whose books are the delight of all English-speaking people. "Your inquiry has set me thinking," he writes; "but, so far, my thought fails to materialise. I mean that, upon consideration, I am not sure that I have methods in composition. I do suppose I have —I suppose I must have—but they somehow refuse to take shape in my mind; their details refuse to separate and submit to classification and description; they remain a jumble—visible, like the fragments of glass

Mark Twain.

when you look in at the wrong end of a kaleidoscope, but still a jumble. If I could turn the whole thing around and look in at the other end, why then the figures would flash into form out of the chaos, and I shouldn't have any more trouble. But my head isn't right for that to-day, apparently. It might have been, maybe, if I had slept last night.

"However, let us try guessing. Let us guess that whenever we read a sentence and like it, we unconsciously store it away in our model-chamber; and it goes with the myriad of its fellows to the building, brick by brick, of the eventual edifice which we call our style. And let us guess that whenever we run across other forms—bricks—whose colour, or some other defect, offends us, we unconsciously reject these, and so one never finds them in our edifice. If I have subjected myself to any training processes, and no doubt I have, it must have been in this unconscious or half-conscious fashion. I think it unlikely that deliberate and consciously methodical training is usual with the craft. I think it likely that the training most in use is of this unconscious

sort, and is guided and governed and made by-and-by unconsciously systematic, by an automatically-working taste—a taste which selects and rejects without asking you for any help, and patiently and steadily improves itself without troubling you to approve or applaud. Yes, and likely enough when the structure is at last pretty well up, and attracts attention, *you* feel complimented, whereas you didn't build it, and didn't even consciously superintend. Yes; one notices, for instance, that long, involved sentences confuse him, and that he is obliged to re-read them to get the sense. Unconsciously, then, he rejects that brick. Unconsciously he accustoms himself to writing short sentences as a rule. At times he may indulge himself with a long one, but he will make sure that there are no folds in it, no vaguenesses, no parenthetical interruptions of its view as a whole; when he is done with it, it won't be a sea-serpent, with half of its arches under the water, it will be a torch-light procession. *Mark Twain.*

"Well, also he will notice in the course of time, as his reading goes on, that the difference between the *almost right* word and the *right*

Mark Twain.

word is really a large matter—'tis the difference between the lightning-bug and the lightning. After that, of course, that exceedingly important brick, the *exact* word—however, this is running into an essay, and I beg pardon. So I seem to have arrived at this: doubtless I have methods, but they begot themselves, in which case I am only their proprietor, not their father."

Not all authors are without conscious methods, either in finding their avocation, or in securing the power of forceful English composition. With some the effort is clearly defined and very intense. The maxim of the French writer, "Put your heart into your business," has been with them the secret of success. They have not stinted themselves; they have not given half their force; they have put their whole heart into their opportunity. For, after all that may be said by men of exceptional ability and experience, the ordinary worker finds there is no royal road to effective power in the literary calling any more than there is in other aspects of life. Here, as elsewhere, fortune smiles only upon men and

women of great industry and sincere earnestness. The following quotations will show what may be done by patient perseverance.

Wilkie Collins.

WILKIE COLLINS, whose death has left a sad blank in the ranks of present-day writers of fiction, was an author of special power. There is moral tonic in his books, stimulating thought, fine and persuasive appeals to the imagination, as well as marvellous plot and weird incident. His strikingly dramatic stories are clothed in language as simple and direct as it is strong and beautiful. The uniform fascinating grace and ease of his diction ceases to surprise us when we read with what minute and painstaking care it is produced. He says, "After some slight preliminary attacks, the mania for writing laid its hold on me definitely when I left school. While I was in training for a commercial life, and afterwards when I was a student at Lincoln's Inn, I suffered under trade and suffered under law with a resignation inspired by my endless enjoyment in writing poems, plays, and stories—or, to express myself more correctly, by the pleasure that I felt in following an undisciplined

Wilkie Collins.

imagination wherever it might choose to lead me. I produced, it is needless to say, vast quantities of nonsense, with an occasional—a very occasional—infusion of some literary promise of merit. But I do not think my time was entirely wasted, for I believe I was insensibly preparing myself for the career which I have since followed.

"My first conscious effort to write good English was stirred in me by the death of my father—the famous painter of the coast scenery and cottage life of England. I resolved to write a biography of him. It was the best tribute that I could pay to the memory of the kindest of fathers. 'The Life of William Collins, R.A.,' was my first published book. From that time to this my hardest work has been the work that I devote to the improvement of my style. I can claim no merit for this. When I first saw my writing presented to me in a printer's proof, I discovered that I was incapable of letting a carelessly-constructed sentence escape me without an effort to improve it. The process by which my style of writing is produced may be easily described. The day's work having

Wilkie Collins.

been written, with such corrections as occur to me at the time, is subject to a first revision on the next day, and is then handed to my copyist. The copyist's manuscript undergoes a second revision, and is then sent to the printer. The proof passes through a third process of correction, and is sent back to have the alterations embodied in what is called 'the revise.' The revise is carefully looked over for the fourth time, before I allow it to go to press, and to preserve what I have written to my readers. My novels are published serially in the first instance. When they are reprinted in book form, the book-proofs undergo a fifth and last revision. Then, at length, my labour of love comes to an end, and I am always sorry for it. The explanation of this strange state of things I take to be, that honest service to art is always rewarded by art."

Mrs. R. Ritchie.

Mrs. Richmond Ritchie, *née* Annie Thackeray, the clever daughter of William Makepeace Thackeray, must surely be counted among the very first of our lady novelists. She is a refined and graceful author, whose tender and beautiful stories are delightfully told—gems set in

Mrs. R. Ritchie. gold. She writes: "How I wish I could answer your kind letter in any definite way. I was always fond of writing stories, but when I was about fifteen my father told me I had much better *read* a few books instead of scribbling so much, and I did not begin to write again till I was past twenty. He used to tell us that the great thing was to write no sentence without a meaning to it—that was what style really meant—and also to avoid long Latin words as much as possible. I remember his once showing me a page of 'The Newcomes,' altogether rewritten, with simpler words put in the place of longer ones. Another old friend, long after, gave me a useful hint, which was to read *aloud* to myself any passage of which I was doubtful—one *hears* an awkward sentence. Any young person with something to say ought to be able to say it, I think; but the manner, of course, depends upon the books he or she reads, and the amount of observation and feeling brought to play upon the subject. I have just been reading some very beautiful passages in Ruskin's 'Præterita,' and he in turn quotes a noble page or two out of Sydney Smith as a model

of meaning and expression. But I don't know whether in my youth I should have cared as I do now for these beautiful outbursts; and perhaps the young ought to think chiefly of the meaning of what they write, and leave the old to try and elaborate their expressions." *Mrs. R. Ritchie.*

LOUISA MOLESWORTH is the author of whom Swinburne, in *The Nineteenth Century*, affirms that, of female writers since the death of George Eliot, "there is none left whose touch is so exquisite and masterly, whose love is so thoroughly according to knowledge, and whose bright and sweet invention is so fruitful, so truthful, and so delightful." There is assuredly a grace of fancy, a tenderness of expression, a simplicity of style in her books, which invest them with as great a charm to older readers as to those on whose behalf they were written. She says, "My own experience is, that one cannot begin to write too young if one wishes to write with ease and individuality. I think my earliest and best training was by translating, both from French and German. I also remember writing essays on given subjects, with heads marked *Louisa Molesworth.*

Louisa Molesworth.

out for me. This practice is of value to a young writer, as tending to keep the mind to the point, and to avoiding discursiveness. It is a great help to read aloud whatever one writes; nothing is a surer test of style than this, and even in one's own family, or among a little circle of friends, one may gain much from the friendly criticism thus brought out. In some ways it seems to me that the old saying of 'one man's meat being another man's poison,' is true as regards rules of composition.

"For my own part I have strictly adhered to the rule of *never copying*. I write at once as I intend the words to stand; the formation of the sentences being thus the work of the brain, unassisted by the sight of the written words. I believe that this leads to great precision of thought, and I believe, too, that it makes the style fresh and vigorous, besides greatly lessening the manual labour. In writing with the intention of copying, one is apt to think, 'Oh, I will set that sentence right afterwards,' and one's first time of writing is generally, therefore, slovenly. Yet I have friends in the first rank as writers of English who do not agree with me in this theory. Among them I

may mention the author of 'John Halifax,' whose death just now we are all deploring. I remember her saying to me, 'To get a chapter *perfect*, I have sometimes written it over fourteen times.' Still I hold to my opinion, but I think the habit must be acquired young. In talking to young people about the art of composition, I think it should be clearly pointed out that it is a subject of interest to all. It is not every one who can write books worth reading; indeed, I think it would be most happy for the world if very many fewer were written! But it is of consequence for every one to express their thoughts clearly and gracefully; and beyond this, again, to think clearly and in a sense, definitely, to get rid of all unnecessary fog and confusion of brain—and nothing helps this more than the training oneself to choosing the best words one can find. It is a frequently given piece of advice, 'not to use a long word where a short one would do,' but it may be acted upon too much. I would rather advise young writers to choose the word which best expresses their meaning, be it long or short. Even in writing for children I do not entirely confine myself to words which

Louisa Molesworth.

Louisa Moles-worth.

they can at once understand; by the help of the context, and a little exercise of their own brains, children soon master a new word's exact meaning, and each new word is so much gained of intellectual treasure."

Mrs. L. Parr.

"Any success my books may merit," writes Mrs. LOUISA PARR, "is in a great measure due to the observance of a rule which I would forcibly impress on all literary aspirants, to spare no pains, to give of your best, and never to rest satisfied until you are certain that you could do nothing better. Good painstaking work irresistibly attracts thoughtful readers, while slip-shod, careless writing only appeals to tastes already lowered, and debases those whose standards might have been raised higher. To expect young people to enjoy the books which more mature tastes regard as master-pieces of fiction is, I think, a mistake we elders often fall into. I remember when it was a penance to me to read Jane Austen, and I have seen those who thought George Eliot's novels dull grow up to hang on every word she wrote. Only cultivate the taste in the right way, and it is almost certain to bring forth the right

fruit. Thirty years ago women had not the educational advantages they now have. I had no special training in composition, but before I published my first book life had taught me some lessons which gave me an insight into human nature and character." *Mrs. L. Parr.*

Another lady novelist, MARY LINSKILL, may be quoted with interest. "In my own case I began to read both prose and poetry with avidity at an early age. Of course, I need hardly say that the natural beginning of all culture is learning, by reading, what others have said; and at the risk of seeming egotism, I must add that my own childish efforts to express myself were made in rhyme, poetry it could not be termed by any stretch of courtesy. I remember having an amusing idea that *prose* was a much too difficult and ambitious thing to be attempted by me. When about twelve years old, I began to practise what I believe was of much use to me, though I did not dream of its use then. I speak of the habit of copying into note-books whatever struck me as unusually worthy. But I was always guided by something in the thought. Style *Mary Linskill.*

Mary Linskill.

may have attracted me; but it must have been unconsciously. Naturally, these things, much reading, some writing, led to the formation of a style of my own at a very early age; long before I perceived it for myself it was discerned by others; so that I have no conscious recollections of any special method or system of training. My own idea is that if any one has a real and true love of literature for its own sake, a keen appreciation of what is best in the mode of expression will follow inevitably. I would recommend the student to lay to heart an axiom of Sydney Smith's, 'Genius is the capacity for taking pains.' I have read that Miss Mitford wrote some of her stories eleven or twelve times over; and an elderly friend told me that Lord Brougham wrote his celebrated speech on the trial of Queen Caroline fourteen times. It is thus that victories are won! Though, for myself, I *now* find that what is once well done is better left alone. It was not always quite so easy."

R. D. Blackmore.

RICHARD DODDRIDGE BLACKMORE, the author of that immortal story, "Lorna Doone," and of several other powerful novels written

with a charming naturalism which goes straight to the reader's heart, speaking of his own work, says, "If I contrive, as you kindly suppose, to put my thoughts into concise and clear form, it is done by no special skill or practised art, but simply by first making sure what I mean, then arranging the words in straight order without waste, and then looking at them, as with a stranger's mind, to learn whether he would take them as I have done. Even if that comes right, I am seldom satisfied with my sentence, any more than a criminal is with his, for sound is apt to conflict with meaning, and a host of little obstacles intervene betwixt myself and a superior reader, which at last I must trust him not to make too much of. Here is a sample of such offence, 'last,' 'mast,' 'trust,' all ending with sibilant sameness! But after all, you will, I think, agree with me that a good deal depends upon luck, as well as care; and sometimes a writer must be satisfied to wait, or even leave off and return to work again, before he can hit upon the turn of words required." *R. D. Blackmore.*

"I believe myself," says PERCY FITZGERALD, *P. Fitzgerald.*

P. Fitzgerald. "that the great difficulty in good literary composition is the descriptive analysis of feelings, characters, impulses, which often a clever person understands perfectly, but does not know how to express with his pen. From a boy I used to keep a very elaborate diary, in which, for a mere pastime and self-entertainment, I used to write down all my own emotions, recollections of pleasant scenes, and thus got into a habit of writing vivid expression in a few words. This, you will note, is no more than practice and familiarity—but the first point is the command of language. I may tell you that practised writers on the press can write almost instinctively, and on any subject, and I really believe I could sit down without an instant's preparation and write a very respectable story, the ideas coming as I went along. After fluency comes, of course, discipline; that is, correction and due restraint."

R. E. Francillon. R. E. FRANCILLON, best known as the author of several popular romances, says: "The question of style interests me very much, not only for personal reasons, but because journalistic work obliges me, every

day, to deal practically with the composition of other people; and very remarkable experiences one gets in that way. I am a purist, at least in theory, but the longer one lives the more one finds out how difficult it is to make practice square with theory, and how one's ideal, instead of being overtaken, flies further and further away. I never gave myself any special training with a view to the formation of style. I wish I had; for I am sure that it is only in early life that one can acquire the immensely important faculty of letting one's thoughts immediately and instinctively suggest their own fullest expression. I have not acquired that faculty, and I do not suppose I ever shall. I have still always to consciously *translate* my thoughts into words; whereas a writer's style ought, for a hundred reasons, to have much of the spontaneous character of the orator's, with, of course, the advantage of finer polish. Whatever merits of style I may have are, I believe, to be summed up in three things —first, to having read, when a boy, scarcely any rubbish, and so having got a good bias; secondly, to having always taken a great interest in the history of words, which some-

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R. E. Francillon.

how seem to me living things; thirdly, to the practice, for pleasure's sake, of translation from foreign languages of both verse and prose; not roughly, so as to give the meaning only, but with an attempt to render all the finer points and shades of the original. I am a great believer in this kind of exercise, quite apart from my own liking, and for other reasons, including the benefit I know I unconsciously derived from it. A young person, when writing out of himself, is occupied with thinking of what he shall say too much to think of how he shall say it—in translating he is able to give his whole mind, indeed must give it, to the *how*. Then, if he writes out of himself, he is very likely to acquire a bad style, as the result of necessarily crude thoughts; if he translates what is worth translating, he will be forced, or drawn, into a style suitable for his own thoughts, when they become mature—for his own mind to grow up to. In translating, he must think of every word, and of every turn of every phrase, and feel that the honour of his original is in his hands. My own translations were mostly of German verse and Greek prose. But if I were training anybody in style, I

should exercise him upon Latin verse and French prose, as the standards respectively of polish and lucidity, obtained from an apparent poverty of material. Flexibility of style would come with practice; force and vigour are not to be acquired, they can only come from forcible and vigorous thought, and from nowhere else in the world. *R. E. Francillon.*

"Two things are very much worth noticing —not every scholar has had a good English style, but every writer with a good English style has been more or less a scholar; and not every writer with a good English style has been a poet, but every poet has been a good writer of prose. I am inclined to think that scholarship, in the old sense, and the practice of writing verse in any language, make up the best foundation for style. The great thing to avoid is newspaper English, *journalese*, with its conventional and mechanical phrases, and its slipshod manner. And people get saturated with *journalese* before they are aware of it; it is becoming a blight upon literature. When, for example, somebody uses the phrase, 'In point of fact,' does he intend to distinguish between fact and fancy, or between fact and

R. E. Francillon.

a priori argument, or does he mean anything at all? And there are thousands of such meaningless flourishes of the pen. In the style to which I am sure anybody who is in earnest can attain, every word would be necessary; every sentence would have rhythm; no sentence would need to be read twice for the discovery of its whole meaning: and the writer would be able to show cause why any given sentence had its given form, and why any word in it was used instead of another. If these tests were answered, the *style* would be good enough, whatever the thought might be. How to obtain the instinctive harmony of thought and expression I know not, I wish I did know! But whatever it be it is clear enough that it must include what I have said —a thoughtfulness over every word, which may become by habit an unconscious second nature."

Francis Galton.

FRANCIS GALTON, the distinguished apostle of heredity, is an author who deals with difficult and unusual inquiries, whose books are the result of an extremely laborious research, and are marked by great ingenuity, originality

and earnestness. It is interesting to learn how such works are composed. "I have a singular difficulty in writing," says Mr. Galton, "due, I believe, to a natural habit of not thinking in articulate words, when thinking hard, but using *gesture thought* largely instead of language; so that when I want to express myself, I often find that I have, as it were, to translate. As a matter of fact, I re-write my MSS. many times, and correct each time very much indeed. For example, at this moment I am revising the proofs of a forthcoming book, 'Natural Inheritance.' In this, besides frequent re-writings of the MS., I have had it type-written almost throughout, twice in succession, and yet have had largely to correct the proofs. The only tendencies that enable me to write intelligibly, are a great desire to be clear in thought and distinct in expression, and an inclination to take much pains. Also I have great appreciation of good and clear writing by others, and a love of getting at the exact meaning of words. I constantly consult good dictionaries, finding a large Dr. Johnson, and the handy Skeat's Dictionary, published by the Oxford Clarendon Press, the most

Francis Galton.

Francis Galton. useful. Also I find Roget's Thesaurus of the greatest help in disentangling the different meanings of a word. It rarely has enabled me to find one, but constantly has enabled me to observe a want of clearness. This very day I have spent a good half-hour over a word *process*—'the processes of heredity'—which as yet I cannot better, but which does not explain exactly what I want. It is easy enough to write off-hand, like this letter, but it is difficult to write a book. In what the difference consists is a little difficult to say, and I will not attempt to express it now. I occasionally see *The Educational Times*, and when I do, I marvel at the beauty of the prize translations in it. Good writers have the art of building their sentences in the simplest way, with the important parts first, and of placing what follows in the most easy-going order."

J. G. Wood. J. G. WOOD sent me a full account of his method of work. His painfully sudden death gives this contribution a pathetic interest. During his laborious life Mr. Wood did more perhaps than any other writer to intensify the popular regard for the study of natural history.

He said, "I never had any special training for the pen, but have always adopted a most careful method. In the first place, I never write on any subject, however trifling, without being perfectly saturated with it, so as to be able to play with it if needful. Then the methodical laying out of the subject occupies at least as much time as the actual writing, often more. Take for example a magazine article. After thinking over the subject, I open a sheet of foolscap and jot down upon it the various points which I want to make, shifting and reshifting them until the article is in skeleton. Then I take each of the headings and expand them in the same manner. Next I cut up the foolscap, which by that time is covered with abbreviated notes, try various alterations in arrangement, and then paste them together in the amended order. By this time I see the complete article like a picture, and not until all these details are satisfactorily completed do I begin to write. *J. G. Wood.*

"Equal pains are taken with the manner of writing. It has always been my aim to write so lucidly that no one shall be obliged to read a sentence twice in order to ascertain its

J. G. Wood. meaning; and if I be not satisfied with the construction of a sentence, I put it into Latin, and see how it looks. Another point is, that when describing or explaining any scientific matter, I try to put myself into the mental position of a reader who is absolutely ignorant of the subject. Simplicity, again, is one of my aims. I hold that language is intended to be a means of conveying ideas from one mind to another, and that the best language is that which conveys ideas to the greatest number of minds. So I never employ scientific technology when the same idea can be conveyed in simple English terms. Scientific nomenclature, like that comforting word 'Mesopotamia,' may be imposing, but it is only intelligible to the few, whereas I write for the many."

Sir A. H. Layard. Sir AUSTEN HENRY LAYARD, whose accounts of researches in Nineveh have been so widely read, fears he has no right to a place amongst writers of forcible English. He says, "I had no training in my youth in composition with a view to authorship. I left England when very young on my travels in the East,

Sir A. H. Layard.

and have been more or less a wanderer ever since. When I published the accounts of my discoveries in Assyria and Babylonia, I had had no practice whatever in writing. I trusted to my full acquaintance with the subject of which I had to treat, and did my best to express my meaning intelligibly. I was of course acquainted to a certain extent with our best authors, and my style, such as it was, was founded upon that of the writers of the early part of last century, which I most admired. My method has been simply this—to think well on the subject which I had to deal with and when thoroughly impressed with it and acquainted with it in all its details, to write away without stopping to choose a word, leaving a blank where I was at a loss for it; to express myself as simply as possible in vernacular English, and afterwards to go through what I had written, striking out all redundancies; and substituting, when possible, simpler and more English words for those I might have written. I found that by following this method I could generally reduce very considerably in length what I had put on paper without sacrificing anything of importance or

Sir A. H. Layard. rendering myself less intelligible. I know very few modern works which could not be cut down to half their size with advantage in every respect. My method would thus be described: Make yourself thoroughly acquainted with your subject before writing, write without special attention to composition, and prune afterwards what you have written."

Prof. A. Bain. "I could not in a few minutes," writes Professor ALEXANDER BAIN, "convey to you any idea of my education in English style. It began when instruction was entirely wanting in the schools and university. I had one valuable monitor in our Professor of Chemistry—Clarke; and for the rest I had to study authors at random. Robert Hall's collected works came out when I was a student, and I read the whole many times over. I was also influenced by Dr. Chalmers, especially in the point of iteration of leading ideas. When I began writing, I strove after lucidity to the best of my power, but it was long ere I discovered the precise arts for securing it. This grew out of my rhetorical teaching in the English class of the university."

F. W. H. Myers.

"I suppose," says FREDERICK W. H. MYERS, "that my study of classical Greek and Latin authors, especially Virgil and Plato, may have had some good effect by familiarising the mind with the best models. But it seems to me that almost the only way to write effectively is to choose some subject on which one really feels deeply and has thought long, and then to select and arrange one's language with a strong desire that one's readers shall understand just what one means, and be persuaded that it is true. I try to read over what I write as though I were a reader both somewhat hostile and somewhat dull of apprehension, and I try to remove any stumbling-blocks which such a reader might encounter in wording or arrangement. And when one's own emotion is strong it seems to impose its own words, even its own rhythm, and to forbid any alternative mode of expression."

Celia Thaxter.

CELIA THAXTER, an American poet, says: "Up to the time of my marriage my life was passed in this wild place"—Isles of Shoals, off Portsmouth, N.H.—"without schools or church, or any society except that of my

Celia Thaxter.

parents and two little brothers. My father taught me what he knew. The first verses I remember to have written sang themselves, a spontaneous expression of the home-sickness for my islands after my marriage, when I left them for the first time. I gave these verses to a friend, who in her turn gave them to her brother, who was on the staff of *The Atlantic* at that time, and he put them into the hands of James Russell Lowell, the editor, who christened them 'Land-locked' and printed them in the magazine. No one was so much surprised as I! The poem is the first in the first volume of my books. After that, verses were always weaving themselves in my brain. I don't know why they came or how they grew; it was my *kismet* I suppose. One rule I laid down for myself, to keep religiously—one or two, perhaps I should say—but this one in especial: never to use more words than I could help to give my full meaning; never to speak a sentence that was not as crystal clear as I could make it; never to sacrifice anything to the allurements of melodious rhyming. To be perfectly direct and as clear as daylight is absolutely necessary to my peace of mind."

Prof. E. Dowden

Professor EDWARD DOWDEN, the eminent Shakespearian scholar, writes an interesting account of his early training and experience. "As to my own apprenticeship in writing," he says, "I have only to tell what I suppose many other persons could tell if you were to ask them. When I was a very small boy my father required me to write a letter about anything I liked once a week. It was perhaps an advantage that no subject was named. Later on this grew into a weekly essay for my tutor, the subject being still left to myself. I took great pleasure in this task, and therefore I did my best to make each little essay good. We attempted—my brother and sister and one or two friends—to get up a small club for essay writing, but the first and only essay written was one by myself on Shakespeare. I don't remember why the design dropped, but at a later time it was revived, and I wrote three or four playful essays and one story. My weekly essays for my tutor were generally on literary topics, and I was promised as a prize when thirty-six had been written—my mother's copy of Shakespeare in twelve volumes, which I still possess. The essays have long since been burnt, but I

Prof. E. Dowden.

can remember that I wrote in an imitative way in many styles, and could produce echoes of Lamb, De Quincey, A. K. H. B., and the smart style of reviewing in *The Athenæum*. I remember in particular a very smart review in *The Athenæum* style on Longfellow's 'Hiawatha,' which had just appeared. My skill in manipulating words and sentences was a good deal in excess of my power of thought, and this was somewhat demoralising I am sure. I have somewhere still two essays which I read at a young men's society when about fifteen years old, on 'The Use of Imagination in the Study of History,' and on 'Bacon's Essays.'

"I certainly read a great deal of good verse and prose when a boy, Spenser and Bacon, Butler's Analogy—which I have never been able to think ill-written—Wordsworth, Shakespeare, the Bible, and much besides. Wordsworth for a long time quite swallowed me up. I lost myself in him. At sixteen I entered college (too early), joined the students' philosophical society, where essays were read and discussed, and wrote a paper on the philosophical subject of 'Nursery Rhymes and Legends,'

which was afterwards printed unaltered in *The Temple Bar*. I also, as a freshman, wrote for the prize for English verse, and gained it by a blank verse competition on 'Westminster Abbey.' I tried again and failed, but gained a prose prize for a long essay on the 'Influences of the Present Age on Poetry and Art.' Before this, however, I had worked hard for honours in the logical, ethical, and metaphysical courses, and never ceased from hard work in this department for three years. This hardened and stiffened my way of writing, for I was trying to think more than to manipulate sentences. I ought to say that ever since I was a boy I had been in the habit of copying a great deal into note-books—first, the disconnected passages of prose or verse which I admired; and afterwards, I worked through a very long course of philosophical books, analysing and condensing each with great pains. Then I got an introduction to Dean Alford, when *The Contemporary Review* was started, and wrote in the second number a long study of 'French Æsthetics.' I should think its fault is the attempt to make an abstract subject popular by little efforts at cleverness. By that time I

Prof. E. Dowden.

Prof. E. Dowden.

was nearly twenty-three years old, at which point I may end my story.

"Before that date I had had two years' study of divinity, which was in some degree a kind of combination of my studies in what we here call 'Logics and Ethics.' Looking back, I seem to see that I always knew some *one* book exceedingly well. At one time it was Bacon's Essays, at another Butler's Analogy and Sermons, at another Wordsworth's Poems, at another Shakespeare's Sonnets; and then it would often happen that the one book dropped out of sight until I quite forgot it. I have almost up to the present time been in this way a man of one book, only the book was a different one from year to year. I have now told you everything I can remember; and I think such apprenticeship as I got falls into three periods: first, when I was learning the use of the means of expression in a queer way, inasmuch as I hadn't much to express; second, when I was learning in some measure to think; and third, when I was escaping from the somewhat formal way of thinking and writing imposed by my studies, to one freer and more personal." In a subsequent note Professor

Prof. E. Dowden.

Dowden says, "In writing narrative, which I have had some practice in, I believe the most important thing is to discover, and then conceal, a logic, a rational order in the sequence, of topics. A mass of incident has to be set forth, and the great art is to convert what is merely chronological into a rational sequence, where one thing leads on to another as it were by natural associations. When one has picked out the facts, separated them into groups, and decided on the order in which the groups shall succeed one another, the thing is really done. When I say 'logic,' perhaps I mean in many cases a logic of the emotions rather than of the intellect."

Sir G. O. Trevelyan.

The series of experiences narrated in this chapter, all bearing directly or indirectly upon method, either in preparation for or in the actual accomplishment of literary labour, may appropriately be closed by the following simple and most useful suggestions contributed by Sir GEORGE OTTO TREVELYAN. "In my view there are three sorts of composition, which should be treated differently. 1. In literary work a man should have a standard of what is

Sir G. O. Trevelyan.

the very best that he himself can do, and he should spare no labour until he is satisfied that that best has been attained. He has no right to print anything which aspires to be literature unless it is, in the smallest particular of form and substance, as good as he can make it. Exercises at school and college come under this head, and no lad who wishes to write his best should hesitate at giving the leisure of a whole day to produce even four lines, when he first begins to write. He will soon get to write his best quite as fast as need be. 2. In speeches and lectures the very greatest attention should be paid to the general structure of the speech, and to the arguments, the illustrations, and the facts; but the words should be those which come naturally. 3. In conversation and letters no forethought should be taken at all, but the tongue and pen should be left to themselves. In this way a man will treat every form of expression according to the purpose for which it is intended. His literary style will have the ease of his conversation, and his familiar letters, conversation, and speeches will profit by the labour which he spends on his literary work."

THE INFLUENCE OF READING ON LITERARY STYLE.

THE INFLUENCE OF READING ON LITERARY STYLE.

WE might range almost the entire series of our contributions from present-day authors under the above topic. The vast majority of those whose names find a place in these pages testify to a systematic, or to an unsystematic but very beneficial species of mental culture, derived from reading. They had, and still have, a strong passion for books. It has been their delight to read whatever came in their way, to assimilate all that suited them, and to let the rest go. Our selections in this chapter will show what an education of thought and heart, and what a powerful formative influence upon their style of composition this intensive and extensive reading exerted.

Of course there is nothing uncommon in such testimony. The results indicated are perfectly natural and inevitable. A good book, as John Milton says, "is the priceless life-blood of a master spirit;" and any man

who reads that book intelligently and sympathetically will have its author's "precious life-blood" infused into his own being, to strengthen and give mastery to his spirit. Converse with great books is converse with great minds. It brings us into personal contact with the ideas, the convictions, the truths which have moved and inspired the world's best and noblest thinkers; and what so animates and rouses the mind, and makes it emulous of larger attainment? To read the Bible, not superficially, but thoroughly, to become acquainted with Shakespeare, to make ourselves familiar with Lord Bacon's works, or the writings of Leibnitz, of Goethe, of Dante, or of Plato, that is an education of priceless value. It is a broad and generous culture which emancipates our minds from narrowness, and gives them that insight and experience which sends us out looking everywhere for what is good, beautiful, and true. For the knowledge which we absorb, which becomes part of ourselves, which roots itself in our consciousness, colours every aspect of our thought and action, and uplifts us, so that we become, in the expressive Scripture phrase,

"New creatures," in whom "old things have passed away, and all things have become new."

Fellowship with the best books may, for this reason, be regarded as the surest means of improving our own literary style. Whatever benefits us in mind, heart, soul, must necessarily colour all we attempt and all we do. Perhaps I may even say such fellowship is the only means of such improvement. A correct knowledge of the intricacies of English grammar must assuredly prove most helpful, but power to use our noble English speech with grace and force can never be attained by any mere learning of technical rules, however admirable. That power comes only by familiarity with the best literature. The contributions which follow will abundantly illustrate the truth of this assertion.

Ernest Renan.

ERNEST RENAN is my first witness. He is perhaps the most remarkable, as he is certainly the most renowned, French writer of to-day. He is not only a man of immense erudition and of high scientific attainments, but in composition is master of a style perfect in its grace and charm, its luminous clearness

Ernest Renan.

and finished simplicity. Mostly dealing with austere themes, he yet clothes his thoughts with such brilliant vivacity, such strength of expression, such resources of fertile imagination, that his books are almost as fascinating to read as a powerful romance. The following is a translation in full of M. Renan's letter :—

"I have not time to write you at length. Besides, the best answer to your question may be the shortest. To write well is to think well; there is no art of style distinct from the culture of the mind. The good writer is a complete mind, gifted with judgment, passion, imagination, and at the same time well trained. The inner qualities of rectitude, of brilliant geniality, are not given; instruction, wealth of information, fulness of knowledge, are acquired. Thus good training of the mind is the only school of good style. Wanting that, you have merely rhetoric and bad taste. Your letter breathes so much sincerity that I have made an exception in its case to the rule I have placed myself under, of very rare letter-writing. Make your readers vigorous thinkers, conscientious scholars, and they will be good writers."

Another great French scholar, well known to English readers as the author of a "History of English Literature," which has had a wide circulation amongst us through the medium of the excellent translation by Van Laun, may be quoted here. H. A. TAINE says: "The men of my time in France have all received a special training with a view to style. It was a classical discipline through the detailed and prolonged study of the great Greek, Latin, and French writers. Reproducing these by short and nervous translations, we were thus made to note their oratorical and literary effects. We analysed their phrases, their paragraphs, their entire chapters; we discerned the play of them; we thus learned to make good plans, which is always an important point. Now, in our day, I still believe this method to be the best. There are masterpieces, both ancient and modern, in which the masters have concentrated their efforts. To discover their processes it is necessary to analyse these masterpieces. This is why, were I giving advice to a young man, I should engage him above all things to read for a long time, pen in hand, the great writers of different countries,

H. A. Taine.

H. A. Taine.

to learn from them to speak in public. The speeches, the essays, and the history of England, by Macaulay; the tales and pamphlets of Swift; with us, the Provincial Letters of Pascal and the pamphlets of Paul Louis Courier, are incomparable monuments of genius. When a finely-gifted mind shall have grasped their meaning, he is capable, if full of faith and enthusiasm, of persuading and convincing all his hearers." M. Taine's own writing is always strong. Sometimes his composition is singularly epigrammatic and forceful. Summing up men and events in striking phrases and epithets, opening great subjects by delicate hints, delighting us every now and again with charming little poems in prose, he makes it impossible for us to read his books with any sense of weariness. They are excellent models for the student of expressive speech.

Sir E. Arnold.

Sir EDWIN ARNOLD, the accomplished author of "The Light of Asia," and of many lyrics of great beauty, says: "I wish I could give you any experiences of a practical kind upon the art of composition worth conveying

to your readers. But it is often the case that the artist knows less of his own methods than the expert who analyses and registers them. Since you are pleased to find in my writings the qualities you speak of, I will briefly observe that I think no elevation or charm of style can be obtained without a constant artistic effort to lift language to its best expression. The good writer never chooses a word at hazard, without noting its harmony in sound as well as sense with what precedes and follows. He never willingly commits the fault of tautology, for repetition of phrase or epithet galls the ear; he never employs redundant epithets, taking care that each adjective shall import fresh ideas. There is as much music in good prose as verse, and the conscientious writer is as particular in one as the other, although verse, of course, demands the finer and closer work. The great thing is to believe in the importance, almost in the vitality, of words, and to use none without the care of the mosaic maker fitting in his terrace. This grows to become a habit, and is quite consistent with very rapid work.

Sir E. Arnold.

"Then one must have a good and well-stored

Sir E. Arnold.

memory, which means preferring always great examples to imitate. I have myself a most tenacious memory, enabling me to carry about my classics, my oriental authors, Shakespeare, &c., in my head. This can be acquired by practice in early life, and is very valuable. Of course the wider the foundation is laid of early study the larger will be the subsequent command of language and illustration. I am afraid I must lay it down as an axiom not to be gainsaid, that nobody, not even that master of spoken English, Mr. Bright,—absolutely none, can be a true judge or example of style who does not well know the classics. It seems to me impossible that any hand can lend the last and loveliest finish to a sentence, or to a verse, who has never dwelled on the perfect labour of Horace, the jewelled Latin of Virgil, Homer's deep-sea music, and the imperial dignity of the chief historians of Greece and Rome. I think, indeed, that to write real, simple English well, a man should know at least as much as I do in the way of living and dead languages—I can read eight or nine —and I think the more he knows the simpler will be his style. Only mark that all the

complexities will be latent in that simplicity; and the practised writer's taste will never be so vigilant and self-questioning as when he seems to be abandoning his pen to its own fervour. In fine, one must believe in all art to be an artist, and most of all in the divine art of writing. And one must have perpetual good-will and steadfast purpose. The only reason of my success is, that I would give the world to say or do anything helpful to my kind." *Sir E. Arnold.*

GEORGE MEREDITH, poet and novelist, has won for himself a permanent place in the ranks of the most artistic, the most thoughtful, as well as the most brilliant writers of our era. Once read, his works can never be forgotten. Shakespeare's men and women are not more alive than his; while their sentiments and actions are portrayed with a keen wit, a deep wisdom, and a knowledge of human nature truly remarkable. He says, "I see there has been writing of late by the younger hands upon their methods; and some of them may have come to a certain perfection, they may be stylists. But it must be rather your liking *G. Meredith.*

G. Meredith.

than discrimination which gives me a claim to this title. I have no style, though I suppose my work is distinctive. I am too experimental in phrases to be other than a misleading guide. I can say that I have never written without having clear in vision the thing put to paper; and yet this has been the cause of roughness and uncommonness in the form of speech.

"Your theme is well chosen. Impress on your readers the power of the right use of emphasis, and of the music that there is in prose, and how to vary it. One secret is, to be full of meaning, warm with the matter to be delivered. The best training in early life is verse. That serves for the management of our Saxon tongue; and may excuse the verse of Addison, in consideration of what he did, side by side with La Bruyère, to produce his pellucid prose. Show, nevertheless, that this Addisonian style can run only in the bounds of a brook; it cannot be largely allusive or guardedly imaginative. Hawthorne, at his best, in some Italian pictures, has an unrivalled penetrative delicacy. Explain that we have besides a Saxon, a Latin tongue in our English, and indicate where each is to be employed, and

the subjects which may unite them; as, for example, in the wonderful sweep of a sentence of Gibbon, from whose forge Macaulay got his inferior hammer. Warn against excessive antithesis—a trick for pamphleteers. Bid your young people study the best French masters. I think it preferable, especially in these days of quantity, to be largely epigrammatic rather than exuberant in diction; therefore I would recommend the committing to memory of passages of Juvenal. And let the description of a battle by Cæsar and one by Kinglake be contrasted, for an instance of the pregnant brevity which pricks imagination and the wide discursiveness which exhausts it. Between these two, leaning to the former, lies the golden mean. *G. Meredith.*

"I wish you well in your address to these young men, and that I could be of greater aid, both in my literary example and the present intimations of how it might have been bettered, though there is one point I should add: That, granting a certain capacity in the writer, he will do wisely, while schooling his nature, not too violently to compress or restain it. If by chance you mention me to them,

G. Meredith.

assure them that my heart is always with the young."

In a second note, Mr. Meredith said: "The highest examples of style are in Greek and Latin, following them, and derived from the classics, French. A study of French prose is useful, even needful. But some knowledge of the classical masterpieces is absolutely necessary to the writer who would pour copiously, yet not overwhelm; be condensed, yet not obscure. In German the English find their own natural faults exaggerated, and Italian prose is verbose, a coil of sounding phrases. Boccaccio, graceful though he is, destroyed the charm of limpid purity in the old stories he drew from. An orator like John Bright, treating of public affairs and the simpler emotions, may rely on his native genius to dispense with a literary knowledge enabling him to be critical. But had he to discourse in and on deeper matters—Philosophy—he would require a richer tongue, and the critical knowledge necessary to guide it. Writing is an art as painting is, and in both we must begin by reverent study of the masters."

F. MARION CRAWFORD is a novelist of considerable talent, whose splendid stories, so solid in substance, so vigorous in expression, so absorbing in interest, move on with increasing dramatic force from the opening chapters to the close. Writing from his Italian home, Mr. Crawford says, "Any facility in writing English which I had when I began literary work I owe to my mother, who writes exceedingly well, though she never published anything. From the time when I was a schoolboy, her letters impressed me very forcibly, and I used even then to try and imitate her style. In this you will see that I had a great advantage over most lads. In all cases, however, I should say, to boys and young men—It is worth while to take pains about the home letters. Most boys have no other opportunity for putting their own impressions upon paper. In writing themes and compositions at school, when these are required, the subject is generally given out, and the boy does little more than try to reproduce what he has read or heard concerning the matter. His personal feelings about his life would make the best subject, together with accurate descriptions of the lives of others.

F. M. Crawford.

F. M. Crawford.

"Secondly, I believe the study of the classics to be of the highest importance in the attainment of style. Here, too, I had an advantage over others, for I was taught Latin as a living language, when a mere child, in Rome. Accuracy in scholarship is a great thing in training the mind; but for developing the imagination there is nothing like being able to read easily a great variety of works. Classical reading is moreover an unfailing resource. It is years since I have allowed a day to pass without reading a few pages of some Latin or Greek author, and if it has not been an advantage to me, it has been a real pleasure. Out of many thousands of pages of the best literature the world ever had, something should remain with the reader, some clear and bright impression must be reflected in his mind and bear fruit. For my own part, I have learned most of the languages of Europe, and some of those of Asia, and have read much in them all; but I am of opinion that the best literature, ancient and modern, is to be found in Greek, Latin, and English. For the man of leisure, it is worth while to learn Italian for the sake of Dante, Tasso, Petrarch, Ariosto, and perhaps

Leopardi. A man who has much time at his disposal may overcome the great difficulties of the German language in order to read Goethe, Heine, Lessing, Schiller, and half-a-dozen others. Time spent in labouring over the obscurities of Kant may not be wholly lost. Six or seven years of unremitting industry may master the curious intricacies of Sanskrit, and open a student's eyes to the beauties of the Vedas, the Mahábhárata, the Ramáyana, or Kalidása. All this may help the mind to grow, though it may also dwarf the imagination and turn a good brain into a mere reservoir for roots and terminations. But a partial knowledge of a dozen literatures is not equal in real effect to a thorough acquaintance with Latin, Greek, and one's own language. A man does not read Sanskrit in order to improve his style in English, and the best things are translated, so that he may feed his imagination upon new scenes and novel comparisons and metaphors without wasting valuable time in acquiring the vocabularies and learning the paradigms of a tongue he will never either speak or write. *F. M. Crawford.*

F. M. Crawford.

"But any one who means to make a career of literature must read widely and must write much. He must learn what other people mean by their words, and must use his own words in such a way as to mean something. If he has a facility for rhyme, let him by all means write verses, provided he does not publish them, and when they are written, let him make sure that every word has a meaning, and can also be construed. I say rhyme, because only the very greatest poets can write blank verse. But in all cases, whether in prose or poetry, let the writer be quite sure of what he intends to say before putting pen to paper. There is, I believe, no greater fallacy than trusting to inspiration, except that of believing that a certain mood is necessary for writing. Ninety-nine hundredths of the best literary work is done by men who write to live, who know that they must write, and who so write, whether the weather is fine or rainy, whether they like their breakfast or not, whether they are hot or cold, whether they are in love, happily or unhappily, with women or with themselves. Of course, a man who has lived by his pen for years, finds out by experience the hours for

working which suit him best; but a beginner should be methodical. He should go to his desk as any other workman goes to his work, after breakfast; rest and eat in the middle of the day, and work again in the afternoon. He should never begin by writing at night, unless he is obliged to do so. He will, of course, often sit at the table an hour or more without writing a word, but if he will only think conscientiously of what he meant to do, he will find the way to do it. The evening is the time to read, and the night is the time to sleep. A literary man should take exercise, but no more than is necessary for health. It is vastly better for the brain to rest too little than to practise athletics too much. Hard rowing, excessive walking and running, exhaust the brain as much as the body. I speak with knowledge, for I have done more physical work than most men in my time, and I do not believe it ever did me any good. All this sounds very small, and yet it has a great importance. Athletics have been overdone in our day, and moderation in all things is disagreeable, and sounds tame to strong men. A man would perhaps prolong his life by living

F. M. Crawford.

F. M. Crawford.

like a ploughman, but he would not develop his intelligence.

"You will probably ask me about my ideas concerning English literature. The greatest literary production in our language is the translation of the Bible, and the more a man reads it the better he will write English. It contains more good strong words, more ideas and better grammar, than any book with which I am acquainted. I am not a particularly devout person, though I am a good Roman Catholic, and I do not recommend the Bible from any religious reason. I distinctly dislike the practice of learning texts, without any regard to the context, merely as maxims, and I dislike the quoting of them even more. But if we were English Brahmans, and believed nothing contained therein, I should still maintain that the Bible should be the first study for a literary man. Then the great poets, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, and the rest. For my part I do not like Wordsworth. He was certainly the least inspired of the great poets. I have read him, however, as a matter of duty. Shakespeare above all is important. I abhor this hundred-book talk in

the newspapers and magazines. A literary man should read thousands of books, and any other person had better read what pleases him best, or what bears most upon his profession, if he has one. A course of Walter Scott does more good than much pottering, and Macaulay's works, read sceptically if you please, will form a better style and a better intelligence than many scattered extracts from a long list of writers. There are certain great works, like the Bible and Shakespeare, which cannot be read too often. There are others which should be read, but for which a couple of evenings ought to be enough. *F. M. Crawford.*

"My last word must be the same as in all other questions of success, the hardest word of all for people of imagination—*work*. Literature is a laborious profession; the competition is enormous; the progress of the beginner slow. But it is a good profession and may be made a noble one; the prizes are great and many too; the glory, once in a century, undying. We do not know who that one famous man will be, but we do positively know that he will be one who has worked harder than most of his fellows. Hard work is not the whole secret, but it is

F. M. Crawford.

half of it, at all events, and a half that lies in every man's power."

Justin M'Carthy.

JUSTIN M'CARTHY, the historian, novelist, and statesman, is an author whose work is eminently readable by reason of its picturesque and attractive style. He says, "I was always, from my childhood, fond of reading, and I took very early to the great masters of English—to Shakespeare, and all the Elizabethan dramatists; to Addison and Steele; to Johnson and Burke. I loved Shakespeare, somehow, before I could possibly have understood half his plots; and I found myself revelling in some of Burke's writings at a time when I hardly knew what he was writing about. I also loved the Greek and Roman classics, and could, when a mere boy of ten or twelve, read Greek and Latin with a fearful fluency, which I look back to now with a certain envy, when I find that I have to go at a slow pace through a page of Sophocles, and like to take my time over Lucretius. But I never studied composition. Early in life it fell to my lot unexpectedly to have to make a living for myself and others; and I soon tried

writing; and you are kind enough to say I have not altogether failed." *Justin M'Carthy.*

"I suppose reading and writing come by nature," writes ANDREW LANG; "certainly I never tried to acquire any particular skill beyond doing composition and translation from Greek and Latin. But I am very glad that this unpremeditated art has been lucky enough to please you. For the rest, I think Thackeray, Fielding, and Swift are about the best modern English authors for a young person to read, so far as manner goes." *Andrew Lang.*

A. W. KINGLAKE, the historian of the Crimean War, says: "I never learnt English grammar; but the five or six years of Eton discipline, with enforced composition in Latin, may have afterwards helped me when writing in my native tongue. I remember once laughing at that Eton part of my education, when Thackeray interposed, saying, 'It has made you what you are.'" *A. W. Kinglake.*

GRANT ALLEN, the author of a few most readable novels and several popular scientific *Grant Allen.*

Grant Allen. works, says: "For style, I attach much importance to the average classical education. I was first in Mod.s at Oxford, and afterwards Composition Master at several public schools. Latin verse and prose, and careful translation from the classics, necessitate much picking and choosing of words, much minute attention to phrase and location. Then I wrote scientific articles, and as these, though on dry subjects, were meant to be popular, this taught me the art of looking out deliberately for the most graphic and interesting ways of putting things. I have also, of course, dabbled in English verse. I never write even a newspaper article now without going over it three or four times, looking for faults, strengthening sentences, substituting strong or vivid adjectives for weak ones, and putting picturesque verbs in the place of the verb 'to be,' and other feeblenesses. I go over separately for various specific defects, and last of all satisfy my ear as to the ring of each separate sentence. Labour—incessant labour, gives the appearance of ease."

W. Marston. Westland Marston, the dramatist and

poet, writes: "I was from boyhood a great reader. In classics I was very conversant with Homer, Æschylus, and Sophocles, also with Virgil and Ovid. I did not then relish Horace so much as I have done in maturer life. About twelve years of age I knew much of Shakespeare by heart. 'Don Quixote' and 'The Arabian Nights' afforded me intense delight, as did also the Waverley Novels. A year or two later I began to appreciate Milton, and I also then found rare pleasure in the speeches of great English orators, of Burke in particular; in the writings and sermons of great divines, of Jeremy Taylor, and in our own day, of Chalmers, Canon Melvill, Robert Hall, &c. What style I have has undoubtedly been fostered and developed by this wide reading. As to composition, the chief rules I have laid down for myself are to avoid superfluous expressions, to choose epithets carefully and use them sparingly, and to frame sentences neither so long as to be cumbrous, nor so short as to destroy continuity." *W. Marston.*

HERMAN MERIVALE is perhaps best known as one of our most popular living dramatists, *H. Merivale.*

H. Merivale.

but he is also a very true and genuine poet, and a prose writer who always wields a graceful and facile pen. He says: "Really, I hardly know. You credit me, rightly or wrongly, with what I value most, a knowledge of my beloved English. If I possess it, I owe it first to the despised classics, to a loving acquaintance with Homer and Herodotus, with Sophocles and Aristophanes, with Horace and Juvenal—and so may it be! If I might venture to quarrel with the inevitable classical teaching, it would be with the hard-and-fast line which forces a classical scholar to read his Aristotle and Thucydides when the first is to him a crabbed and awkward philosopher, the second an unintelligible historian who didn't know anything of his own beautiful language. Plato *is* exquisite, and so is Herodotus, though we may believe in neither—clear, manly, and straightforward. But my first literary love I owe to such classics as I could love and understand. When such classics die, English or any other scholarship—the opposite to that humbug 'culture'—dies with it, in my poor opinion. And I fear that, thanks mainly to 'science,'—that wisdom of man

which is foolishness with God—it is dying, and very fast. *H. Merivale.*

"Secondly, English. I was nursed and bred by my dear, great father, and by natural taste on my Bible, Shakespeare, Scott, and Macaulay, &c.; on the big men who thought and said big things (in details right or wrong), and in the big, straight English of the greater ages. 'Man's life was *spacious* in the early world,' says a great English writer, George Eliot, in 'Jubal.' Give me after that the 'masters,' whatever the form may be—Bacon, Lamb, De Quincey, Thackeray. In present days, 'John Inglesant,' and to me, none other. The 'one hundred books' of Sir J. Lubbock are to me, *stuff*. A man is a scholar (dear old lost word!) if he thoroughly knows *one*, and that a good one. Nobody ever knew one hundred. Life is short, and the thing cannot be done. Familiarity with any one foreign language is a great addition, and one is all any man can grasp. I *do* read French—the best, because the clearest in style and expression—as easily as English. French is the foundation of modern style and thought (the good French, not Zola), and study is studiless without it."

J. H. Shorthouse.

J. H. SHORTHOUSE, the author of that splendid book "John Inglesant," a romance remarkable for its finish, refinement, and chivalric spirit, is a writer whose literary work is always marked by purity, nobility, loftiness of purpose, and deep spiritual suggestiveness. "My interest in English literature began very early," he says, "as my mother, who was an excellent reader, spared no time or pains in reading to us, as soon as we could understand them, any of the best writers who she thought would be likely to entertain and improve us. In this way we were familiar when very little boys with the best parts of Sterne, Addison, Johnson, Cowper, Mary Howitt, Mrs. Sherwood, &c. My father was also a man of cultivated literary tastes. I do not suppose that it is easy to over-estimate the influence of early training and heredity in this matter. My father took me from school early, about sixteen, and I had ample leisure, and tutors with whom I read French and Italian, besides keeping up some of my Latin and Greek. My father had a considerable library, and I had ample means of purchasing books, and became very early interested in seventeenth-century English. I

mention this because I am convinced that seventeenth-century English—that of Jeremy Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne, Milton, and many others—is the foundation of a nervous, subtle, fruitful style, resembling in graphic fulness of thought the German more than any other. It requires toning down, but taken in conjunction with the study of the eighteenth-century English, I do not know that more is wanted. In the way of general advice, I can only suggest the taking of infinite pains, and the avoiding, like the plague, any attempts at affectation, or the use of vulgar, colloquial, penny-a-liner, or what are supposed to be humorous, phrases. I would allow very great latitude in the use of words. Your instinct and taste must be your guide in this. But, above everything, strive to form every sentence so as to express your meaning in the simplest way, and in accordance with the easiest, plainest rules of English grammar. I am not afraid of a picturesque style, or what is called fine writing, provided you get both grammar and sense."

J. H. Shorthouse.

The author of "John Herring"—S. BARING-

S. Baring-Gould.

S. Baring-Gould.

GOULD—writes: "I hardly know myself what has been pre-eminent in my apprenticeship in literature. I began to write when quite a child, and always had a turn for letters. Having ever been a great reader in all departments, it has led to a discrimination in style between good, bad, and indifferent. My natural inclination is towards archæology and history. I have been driven to take to fiction, because fiction alone pays; but I never have been a novel reader. Indeed, I dislike reading a novel. I turn from one with distaste, as a pastrycook from tarts. Having spent most of my youth abroad in France and Germany, I am able to read and converse in French and German without difficulty, and I can manage to read without difficulty Icelandic, Swedish, Danish, Italian and Spanish—all that sort of thing is mere knack after one knows the key languages, early Norse, German and Latin. I fancy that the best training for writing good English is the reading and copying out of long passages from the old masters. I think French helps to train to think and express oneself compactly, and that German is a caution against involution of sentences."

Even where a man has no classical training, or but little, even where he has no knowledge of modern languages, or but little, I believe that it is quite possible for him, if he determines to do so, to acquire an efficient style of composition. What others have done he may surely accomplish in the measure of his ability and industry. To clothe his thoughts in appropriate words, to express himself in a manner interesting and agreeable to others, is within the reach of any man's possibility, if only he will give the necessary time and labour. But the difficulty with so many aspirants after literary honour is, that they get the form of knowledge without the power, the dead shell with no living kernel, and are satisfied with what they get. They forget that thought divorced from life, learning not verified by experience, culture not tending to action, has never yet created and sustained a true literary development. Truth seen only with the eye is at best superficial and unreal. Authors who win a lasting reputation are not simply content with observing facts and reporting them; they are those who enter into life, bear its burdens, penetrate its meaning, passionately seeking

what lies at the heart of it; and so make their work a service to the literature of the age, by making it true to the everlasting realities of human nature and experience. As Lord Bacon says, "If you will have a tree bear more fruit, it is not accomplished by what you do to the boughs; but the stirring of the earth round the roots, and putting new mould there, that must work it." It is the radical and profound study which goes to the roots of things, and is not satisfied with merely filling the mind with words and phrases, that Ben Jonson refers to when he says of Shakespeare—

> His learning savours not the school-like gloss
> That most consists in echoing words and terms,
> And soonest wins a man an empty name,
> But of a poesy all rammed with life.

C. G. Rossetti.

CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI, perhaps foremost among living poetesses, who writes with a delightful grace and simplicity which charm us without making us stop to think we are being charmed, may speak to us with appropriateness at this point. Referring to her brother, Dante Gabriel, renowned both as poet and artist, she says: "His Latin and Greek were

those of a schoolboy, who, moreover, left school—King's College—early to commence training as an artist. His Latin, I fancy, was available in after life, his Greek not worth a mention. As to living languages, he was familiar with Italian and French, and not quite ignorant of German. As he never visited Italy, I surmise that his Italian was literary rather than colloquial." Of her own work, Miss Rossetti says, "It happens that my style resulted not from purposed training, so much as from what I may call hereditary literary bias, and from constant association with my clever and well-read parents. Neither nursery nor schoolroom secluded their children from them; indeed, our household was too small for any such separate system; and though my sister and my two brothers studied more or less, of myself it may be said that I picked up more than I learned. I do not recollect that I was ever exercised in English composition as a task, though to all of us it early became more or less a delight. Perhaps the nearest approach to a method I can lay claim to was a distinct aim at conciseness. After a while I received a hint from my sister

C. G. Rossetti.

C. G. Rossetti.

that my love of conciseness tended to make my writing obscure, and I then endeavoured to avoid obscurity as well as diffuseness. In poetics my elder brother was my acute and most helpful critic, and both prose and verse I used to read aloud to my dearest mother and my sister."

Edna Lyall.

EDNA LYALL, the *nom de guerre* under which Miss Ada Ellen Bayly writes, is the author of several powerful stories, admirably written, and revealing an individuality both striking and unconventional. Their tone is pure and lofty, their purpose wisely moral, and their composition always graceful, and sometimes rising to genuine and vivid power. They can heartily be recommended to young people, not only as samples of good style, but also as books which cannot fail to exert an ennobling influence upon the reader's heart and mind. She writes, "I find it rather difficult to reply to your letter as I have hardly any regular rules as to writing. I never went through any special training, but had a good education of the ordinary kind, sometimes with governesses, sometimes at

schools. I have always meant to write since I was nine or ten years old, and so used to take special interest in everything that could help me in that way, except in Allen and Cornwall's Grammar and Morrell's Analysis, which I cordially detested, and to this very day I am sorry to say I rely more upon my ear than upon the rules of grammar. An aunt of mine who read your letter, tells me I was very much interested in a volume of Blair's lectures at twelve years old, specially in what he said about style, but I cannot say I remember anything about them now. Being educated for three years with a cousin older than myself, I read a good many books at that time which must have been far beyond my powers, such as Paley and Abercrombie. We were always expected on Sundays to take notes of the sermons we heard. I think, perhaps that was a good training. My mother also always encouraged us to make extracts out of any book that we specially liked, and I fancy the habit is a very good one, and teaches children to keep their eyes open for what is really beautiful. *Edna Lyall.*

"As to rules in writing, I hardly know

Edna Lyall.

what to say. Whenever I am in doubt about a sentence I read it aloud to see how it sounds, and indeed, always read the whole book through aloud, sometimes more than once, before it goes to the press. In describing things, I always try to see the whole scene before beginning to write it, and specially to realise the *colour* of everything. I think it is also a good plan never to use a long word when a short word will do, and to cure oneself as far as possible of a trick common to almost every one, of using four or five adjectives before a noun. For the rest, I think the only way is to have something to say, and then to say it as simply and straightforwardly as you can. I fancy it is good to read well-written books aloud to children. All Scott's novels were read to us, and some of Miss Austen's and Miss Edgeworth's. We were also allowed to have Miss Yonge's novels when we were ten or eleven, and read them again and again till we almost knew them by heart. After all, the great thing is continual practice, and continual patience, and a readiness to have your faults pointed out to you."

E. LYNN LINTON, the author of many novels attractive and interesting for their vividly-sketched characters and the unflagging animation of the narrative, and also of a large number of popular essays always marked by careful writing and strong common sense, says of herself: "When I first began to write I had no notion of style. If I could get the elemental principles of grammar right that was all I thought of. Of grace, construction, eloquence, conscious word-manipulation I had not an idea. I remember the wakening to the sense of style came to me from this one phrase, 'the solemn charity' with which one speaks of the dead. That 'solemn charity' was a ray of inspiration to me! It came to me as such a fine expression! After that I began to consider turns of phrase and the dignity of words; and now I am almost a faddist for purity and correctness. In early life I had all my own training to do, as we had no regular or irregular instruction. I taught myself languages as the best weapon I knew of, for I had resolved to be an authoress when I found that my short-sightedness hindered my being an artist; but the style came only by very long study and obser- *Mrs. E. L. Linton.*

Mrs. E. L. Linton.

vation, and keeping myself open to every kind of criticism. My early books are full to the margin of defective formations. I think the later ones are freer; but my first thought is always ungrammatical (most of my letters are badly expressed), which necessitates laborious revision of the MS. I know no better method of improving the style than that of reading good authors simply for the sake of their method; analysing, studying, getting to the heart of their power. Read a master, and then a very poor beginner, and the difference will be seen at once. The beginner who says, 'Commence, conclude, progress, different to, under circumstances, averse to,' who is loftily disregardful of nominatives, who makes a singular verb govern clauses of varying number, who is frightened of and has no nerves in his own language—he is a good sign-post, showing the way not to go, like those old spelling books which gave faulty spelling as a lesson. But one is always learning! Owing to my defective ground-work of education I am always finding out some new error of style or syntax of which I am habitually guilty. One thing, however, I do strive against—dislocation of sentences. I

try to write sequentially, and not to put the natural sequence into a dislocated part of the phrase, as for example, 'I am not going, I don't think.' How many people form their sentences in this manner, and how often one wishes to be able to pull the separated parts together!" *Mrs. E. L. Linton.*

Miss ROSA N. CAREY has had no special training for her literary work, and has used no particular method. "In my opinion," she says, "it is the greatest help in composition to read the works of our best authors, as their style exercises an unconscious influence, and one learns to appreciate the best. It was my habit as a girl to tell stories to a younger sister; one of these—'Nellie's Memories'—so took possession of my imagination that after some years I resolved to work it out. The characters had lived with me so long that they had become almost my personal friends. In my succeeding books I have thought less of the interest of the plot than of the development of character, and the workings of human nature under ordinary circumstances." Miss Carey's novels are full of strength and tenderness. *Miss R. N. Carey.*

Mrs. C. Riddell.

"All my life I have lived with cultured persons who spoke good English," says Mrs. CHARLOTTE RIDDELL, the novelist who at one time wrote under the *nom de guerre* of F. G. Trafford. "Further, I had the enormous advantage of being turned loose while very young into a big library, where I grazed without let or hindrance. If there were any weeds there, they did me no harm. I never knew there were any. Next, mine has been, not a sorrowful life, but a life of sorrow, and sorrow teaches reticence; so perhaps trouble may have given me a little strength of expression. I am afraid to quote, but I think it was Macaulay who said, 'The Bible and Shakespeare are sufficient to form the best style,' and I quite agree with this. Were I advising a would-be author, I should say, Read good books; never use a long word when a short one will serve; avoid slang like a pestilence, and always write your very best, feeling you have an audience higher than any public—which is GOD. . . . I fancy I omitted to repeat one piece of advice which was given to me very early in my London experience by a gentleman connected with *The Saturday*

Review in its most brilliant days, viz., 'Put no check on your pen while writing, but blot freely afterwards.'" *Mrs. C. Riddell.*

Another lady novelist, Mrs. EMILY LOVETT CAMERON, bears similar testimony. "I am afraid that I can lay claim to no special system or training in style of composition, save a natural inclination towards 'scribbling,' and a dangerous affection for pen and ink. But I do think that a study of the best standard works of fiction is the greatest help a novel writer can have towards the improvement of style. I have always considered Trollope's books quite perfect as regards grammatical English, and Jane Austen's delineations of character and refinement of feeling have long been my *beau ideal* of all that is good in authorship. Whenever I have the time I refresh my mind by the study of these and other great writers, such as George Eliot, the Brontës, and of living writers, Mrs. Oliphant, with ardent admiration, and I feel sure with some profit to my humble self." *Mrs. E. L. Cameron.*

Still another lady story-writer, Miss *Miss F. M. Peard.*

Miss F. M. Peard.

FRANCES M. PEARD, refers to the influence of good reading upon literary style. "Writing grew out of a wish to write," she says, "and without any determination to make it a profession. From the time when I was a very young child I was allowed to read Scott, Shakespeare, Spenser, &c., with absolute freedom; and perhaps a familiarity with such writers teaches even a child to feel, if unconsciously, the difference between bad and good English. Without reaching a high level of style oneself, it makes one, all through life, turn away from what is inferior. I fancy that, specially when one is writing oneself, it is well only to read books in which language and style form useful models, and to avoid those with mannerisms. As for composition, I have as little to say as with regard to style. My own plan is, I am afraid, too vague. I get a rough general idea in my head, but I find I must get my characters alive and set them going before I can be clear what they are to do, and their actions are not what I at first foresaw."

R. Buchanan.

ROBERT BUCHANAN, poet, novelist, dramatist,

a man of great and diversified gifts, writes: "If my style has any merit it is due to the early study of English dramatic poetry, particularly that of the Elizabethan period. Up to the age of twenty, a man thinks of style alone, having as yet nothing to say, and such was my case. But when I found I possessed some thoughts to utter, I discovered that the English poets were my best and only guides as to how to utter them." *R. Buchanan.*

WILLIAM BLACK, whose early stories, pure, simple, deeply-interesting, and nobly written, are favourites custom cannot stale, says: "In such a matter I shouldn't imagine that the experience of any one person would be of much use to anybody else. If young people want to acquire the art of writing English simply and naturally, they may safely be recommended the masters of the tongue—Tennyson and Thackeray for choice—and also incessant practice. But if their ambition this way is connected with a wish to enter the already overcrowded ranks of the literary profession, then it would be the truest kindness to advise them to stay where they are." *William Black.*

G. M. Fenn.

"I can only tell you," writes GEORGE MANVILLE FENN, "that, beyond the ordinary education that one acquires in early life, I went through no special preparation whatever, and that I can only suppose any facility I may possess in composition to be the result of constant writing out the ideas that have more or less impressed me in my career. Style I take to be naturally acquired, imperceptibly so to speak, from reading largely the best works of our best men. Pray do not attribute the following to egotism and conceit when I say that I believe the power is innate, just as to one is given a melodious voice, to another a handsome personal appearance, to another the power to speak in public forcibly and well. Of course, these gifts can be largely developed, but I am sure that the germs must be there, or the cultivation would be a sorry affair. In my own case I was, as a boy, thrown very much on my own resources, and books were, I may say, my only friends. Consequently, I devoured everything I came across, good, bad and indifferent; but still, I naturally possessed a great love of reading. . . . I can only add that, before I begin to write a book, I think

over it for some time pretty deeply; try to realise and individualise my characters, and then, after making voluminous notes, try to put myself in the place of each person in my story, and make him or her speak and think as would be the case in the circumstances in which the said character is placed." *G. M. Fenn.*

JOSEPH HATTON, a well-known writer of very versatile power, thinks there is no royal road to the formation of style in composition, and that, whatever study we may give to the subject, it depends upon an earnest desire to write because we have something to say. "You are good enough to compliment me," he says, "on my apparently easy method of composition, and you ask me for the secret of it, and my experiences in the formation of the art of writing well and picturesquely. When I was very young I was a great reader of books of travel, and the novels of Defoe, Smollett, Cooper, Hugo, and Dickens. My father was a newspaper proprietor. When I had resolved not to become a lawyer, but to write for the newspaper press, or for any other press that would print my work, I read Macaulay, and *Joseph Hatton.*

Joseph Hatton.

De Quincey, *The Times*, and all kinds of descriptive articles, for the purposes of journalistic style. Having mastered what seemed to me to be the secret of Macaulay's simplicity and strength, I invariably kept him in mind when I was engaged upon an essay, journalistic or otherwise, and I think De Quincey influenced me in the construction of sentences, and in the arrangement of my facts and ideas. The chief secret of Macaulay's style, I believe, lies in setting forth in every sentence either a fact or an idea. The most delightful examples of literary method are to be found in the 'tremendous opposites': Addison, Carlyle; Dryden, Emerson; Hume, Ruskin; Hawthorne, and Thackeray.

"You ask me what is the best way to form a good literary style. Read the best authors, not only for themselves, but for the purpose of trying to understand their methods of composition; fill yourself with knowledge; observe men and things; read the newspapers; travel; form your own opinions of the world and its doings. When you write be sure you have something to say, something worth describing, some opinion worth expressing.

Joseph Hatton.

Before you sit down make up your mind what you are going to write, and then set forth your views, your experiences, or your opinions in the simplest and most direct language you can command. If you have individuality of character striking enough to make itself felt in any direction, it will come out in your work. When you have had sufficient practice to have mastered the habit of composition and to express your ideas, you will find you have formed a characteristic style of your own, and that writing will soon become for you a mere question of having something to say. But always remember that next to the importance of your matter is the consideration of the artistic method of placing it before the reader. The style marks the man. Let your sentences not only contain facts or ideas; let them scan well, and be euphonious in the reading. Satisfy yourself that your work is artistic as well as interesting, and that, however laboured it may be in the preparation, it reads as if it had been what many incompetent writers call 'dashed off.' Nothing worth reading is 'dashed off' without much previous preparation. If you have thought slowly you

Joseph Hatton.

may write quickly. There are many works on style, old and new; I have found none of them of much service, they are generally pedantic, and sometimes written by persons who cannot write the pure English they discuss and illustrate.

"I have given you in these few lines a glance at my own experience in the formation of style, and I do not say I have solved the problem, nor even suggested how you can solve it; but I have responded to your inquiries as best I can in so brief a space, taking no note, as you see, of the value of an early classical training and a knowledge of the best poetry. So far as the great masters of the ancient tongues are concerned, I have become acquainted with them, as a rule, second-hand, but I venture to think that much time is often wasted in the study of dead languages, which modern scholars have made alive for all who care to study the literature thereof in translations that, I imagine, contain the very essence of the originals, with the additional advantage to the student that they are frequently fine examples of English, pure and undefiled. In conclusion, and once more in

reference to myself and my work, I would like to say I have always been a miscellaneous reader, from the Bible and 'the Fathers,' and even down to Beecher and Ingersoll; from Shakespeare to Whitman; from Plutarch to the Newgate Calendar; from Scott to Ouida; from Keats, Coleridge, Pope, Wordsworth, Byron, to the 'Poet's Corner' of the local newspaper; from Tennyson to—well, whatever minor poet you may select, for I have read most of them; from 'Don Quixote' to 'She'; from Dickens to his latest imitator; and I have always loved books of travel and biography. Who does not know and revel in Wallace, Stanley, Smiles, Boswell, and all the rest of the great company of travellers and biographers, ancient and modern?" *Joseph Hatton.*

AUBREY DE VERE, a poet, the son of a poet, a Roman Catholic, a lover of the old order, a born idealist, an author of elevated and refined style, writes to say: "My attention was much drawn to the subject in my boyhood by several scholarly friends, who lamented the decline of style in recent days, and by some remarks in Hare's 'Guesses at Truth,' and the works of *A. de Vere.*

A. de Vere.

Walter Savage Landor. The latter and Cardinal Newman appear to me to be the two chief masters of style in our time, and I have read them carefully for that merit, as well as for other merits higher still. Among other modern writers I should name Charles Lamb, Coleridge, Shelley, and Southey, as especially good in style; while I cannot sympathise with the admiration often expressed for Macaulay, any more than for Gibbon, who seems to me to mingle the pompous and the epigrammatic with a very offensive self-consciousness, though, of course, not without much power. My attention was early directed to the grand style of the old English divines, especially Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, and Barrow, whose marvellously long sentences, with their magnetic onward flow, I much admired, as well as the skill and care with which they always extricated the meaning from the labyrinths of multitudinous clauses. Still more wonderful in these respects I thought some of Milton's prose works; while, of course, I admired also those more compact and yet hardly less stately writers of English literature's silver age, such as Dryden, Swift, Bolingbroke, and Berkeley.

"As regards education in style, I should suppose that nothing can help the young more than a careful and systematic study of its greatest masters; for we learn to write as we learn to speak, chiefly through sympathy and unconscious imitation. Landor has said that 'Style is part of a man's character.' It at least shares much in the character of his intellect; and to write in a noble style a man should learn to think habitually with force and clearness, retaining, even when his thought becomes most impassioned, a vigilant mental self-possession—a thing singularly wanting in the style of Carlyle, who seems never able to rouse up his faculties until he has flung himself into a condition, not only of energy, but of vehement excitement, a condition in which the language overruns the thought and tramples it down. *A. de Vere.*

"A good style is, of course, the result of care, but the care should be of that quick, habitual sort which does not flurry or frighten the writer, and it should be rather negative than positive; that is, it should proceed from a conscientious desire not to sin against grammar, not from a vain-glorious wish to excel.

A. de Vere. Probably the finest passages have been written without a consciousness that they were fine. Many writers seem to miss the mark from too great eagerness to carry some one particular merit to an unprecedented height. Some fancy that only Saxon words should be used; others will only tolerate those derived from the Latin; the fact being that the former class imparts strength, like short sentences, and the latter grace and dignity, like long sentences, and consequently that both classes are needed, each in its place. A young writer should be well acquainted with some works exposing incorrectness of style in its very numerous forms. One book that I looked over lately, 'Deacon's Composition and Style,' surprised me by the number of errors it detected even in our classic writers. I was also surprised to find how much I had myself to correct, when, quite lately, Macmillan brought out for me in two volumes, 'Essays, Chiefly on Poetry,' in which I had collected contributions of mine to our chief periodicals in past years."

J. A. Symonds. JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS, the author of a fine study of the Renaissance in Italy and

other scholarly works, is marked as a writer by culture of rare distinction, critical ability, of signal penetration, and a literary sense of the very finest. "I was always fond of reading and of learning poetry by heart," he says, "and my father, a man of very cultivated mind, used to read select passages from the best authors aloud to us. In this way I heard, while yet a boy, much of Milton's, Jeremy Taylor's, Sir Thomas Browne's, Lamb's, Landor's, and Bacon's prose. I was educated at Harrow. But there I did not distinguish myself at all in English composition. I failed signally to win either English essay or English poem. Yet I think I must have been forming a style unconsciously; for I came the other day upon a diatribe in MS. of that period which seemed to me not without merit of a rhetorical kind. It was written for my own amusement on the conceptions made severally by Homer, Virgil, and Dante regarding the state of souls in the next world. The influences of De Quincey, of whom I was a diligent student then, is apparent. During my time at Oxford I practised writing assiduously, and began to feel that I had some power. Hardly

J. A. Symonds.

J. A. Symonds.

a day passed without my composing something in verse or prose for my own pleasure; while I also spent great pains upon a weekly essay for my tutor, Professor Jowett. His observations, and the criticisms my father occasionally gave me, were extremely helpful. They checked my tendency to a vague and sentimental rhetoric.

"Great facility of expression has always been my bane, combined with a natural partiality for sensuous imagery. I attribute any degree of strength and purity of style to which I may subsequently have attained in no small measure —(1) to the composition of essays on very metaphysical topics for so good a critic as Professor Jowett; (2) to the habit of translation from the Greek. I was fortunate in enjoying the intimate friendship of Professor Conington, who also helped me by sound advice. His own style was clear and vigorous, without affectation. He laughed me out of many of my conceits and prettinesses. All this while I kept on composing English verses; the style modelled, by sympathy rather than calculation, upon Tennyson and Keats. But Conington was convinced that I could not be a poet, and his

discouraging influence prevented me from studying poetry with system. The only wrong direction I am aware of having received from any one was from him, when he once said: 'Your forte lies in poetical prose.' I took the hint too literally; and when I felt inclined to write verse, used often to compel myself to prose expression, the result of which was that I got into a hybrid habit of writing which has given offence to many of my critics. I ought to add that from the age of eighteen to twenty-four I kept a diary, chiefly for the description of impressions made on me by landscapes and works of art. This I am quite sure helped to form my own style more than all else. The emotional passages of the diary are in verse, the descriptive and critical passages in prose. If you happen to know my books of 'Italian Sketches,' you will be interested to know that they are largely extracts from this journal. *J. A. Symonds.*

"On leaving Oxford I began two kinds of study, which had a powerful effect upon my style. One was writing for *The Saturday Review;* I was just twenty-one when I first became a regular contributor to that periodical.

J. A. Symonds.

The other was a systematic reading of the Elizabethan dramatists. In the course of three years I read them from beginning to end, and wrote a complete series of studies on them, which I refrained from publishing, feeling the work too immature. I reached the age of thirty-one before I published a book under my own name. Severe illness spoiled for me the years between twenty-three and thirty. I could not use my eyes, and broke down in the lungs. But I am of opinion that the enforced inaction of that period was not an entire evil. It made me reflect more, and checked my natural fluency; although it prevented me from acquiring exact knowledge and prosecuting *études fortes* at the time when the intellect is best fitted for such work. To sum up. My training in style has consisted in (1) early habits of reading, with love, for pleasure, in a desultory way, without the sense of obligation; (2) sustained practice in several kinds of writing, partly under the eyes of strict criticism, partly in journalism, partly with a view to arriving at self-expression, and to recording impressions with fidelity, while they were pert and present to the mind,

in diaries. But it has never been a systematic or deliberate training. *J. A. Symonds*

"Cicero's motto, *Nulla dies sine lineâ*, is the first precept for a would-be author. In the second place, he should learn to respect the criticism of his elders, even though it goes against his own tastes. Although it may not be possible to teach style, it is certainly possible to direct the young by sound advice from mannerisms and affectations."

Professor JAMES BRYCE says, "I have never made any study of style, or read any writer with a view to the formation or polishing of style. Sometimes it has occurred to me that a man might much improve himself by this; but I have never had leisure to study the masters of style, or in writing to think of anything except how most clearly to state what one had to say. However, I fully believe that the right thing for any one who would write well is to con over the best masters of English, especially the six or eight of our best poets, and I heartily wish I had done so, being confirmed in this view by a very bright and sensible article by R. L. Stevenson, *Prof. J. Bryce.*

Prof. J. Bryce. in a little volume of his well worth reading. And I know that three or four other of our most acceptable writers have modelled themselves on English classics, such as Burke and Milton. Of living writers, the best model, though one whose art it would be difficult to catch, seems to me to be Cardinal Newman. There is, of course, the danger that a student may become a mere imitator, and provoke the annoyance of his readers by reproducing mannerisms rather than merits. The study of a number of masterpieces, equally carefully, would check this. The one practical suggestion I can make from personal experience is, that it is impossible to take too much pains over arranging the heads of a subject before sitting down to write. The whole progress of the argument ought to be clear and consecutive in the mind before the pen sets to work. Time is saved in the long run."

Peter Bayne. "I am very far from satisfied," says PETER BAYNE, "with my own manner of writing, and should have real difficulty in making up my mind, with anything like dogmatic decision, as to what influences have done me good and

what influences have done me harm. So many are the classically admirable masters of English style that I shrink from naming any, but would advise the student to shun being dominated by any *one* writer, however fascinating or however forcible and clear. After all, I am constrained to fall back on the commonplace remark that the art of composition, whatever may be its importance, comes in the second place, not the first. Read diligently and comprehensively, think with care and patience, know accurately, feel sincerely, then write unaffectedly, and you will write as well as nature and God have fitted and intended you to write." *Peter Bayne.*

A few testimonies and experiences from across the Atlantic may not be without some special interest.

SARAH ORNE JEWETT is one of the best literary artists amongst the American writers of short stories. Her composition is simple, yet full of force; while the pictures she paints of village life are inspired by a deep-felt sympathy with the common people. "I hardly *Miss S. O. Jewett.*

Miss S. O. Jewett.

know what to say about my early plans," she writes, "and especially about any definite study that I gave to the business of writing. I was not a studious child, though always a great reader, and what individuality I have in my manner of writing must be a natural growth and not the result of study or conscious formation. Of course, at one time, I, like all young people, was possessed of great admiration for different authors, but I do not remember trying to copy their style in any way, excepting that I remember thinking that if I could write just as Miss Thackeray did in her charming stories I should be perfectly happy. I tried to model some of my own early work on her plan. I see very little likeness, I am sorry to say, as I read it over now! I believe very much in reading English books like Walton's and others of his time; though I think I have learned as much from the telling of simple stories and character sketches in the 'Sentimental Journey' as from anything. They were great favourites with my father, and were easily impressed on my mind; the monks, and the starling, and the peasants' dance in particular."

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS, widely known in the United States by his delightful books of travel, character sketches, and stories, and known to English readers by his bright and readable contributions to *Harper's Magazine* in "The Editor's Easy Chair," says of himself: "Whatever my style of writing may be it is the result of natural selection, and not of special design. The first author who interested me deeply, after 'Robinson Crusoe' and the usual children's books of fifty and sixty years ago, was Washington Irving. Then came Walter Scott and Charles Lamb, Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth, then Bacon and Emerson, Burke and Carlyle, Thackeray and Hawthorne. But rhetoric or composition I have never studied. My long connection with the Press has been of the utmost service to me as a writer. For many years I have been the chief editorial writer upon *Harper's Weekly*, a paper which takes part in political discussion, and the necessity of making myself intelligible to the rapid reader in a comparatively short space has been probably the best training I could have had. Fortunately I have no taste for what seems to me the frequent extravagance of

G. W. Curtis.

G. W. Curtis.

newspaper writing, and therefore I have easily avoided it. Every young writer should remember that bigness is not greatness, nor fury force. Perhaps, after all, the style is the man, and we can only say with Byron's Deformed, 'I was born so, mother.'"

R. H. Stoddard.

RICHARD HENRY STODDARD, one of the foremost professional literary men, and one who has done excellent service to American letters, writes: "If I write good English I can only say it is because I have long read the best English books, the masters of our noble language; and, furthermore, because those amongst us who speak or think before they write are more careful than the majority are in using their native speech. Beyond reading great English books I have no training. I try to think clearly, and to put what I think directly and as strongly as I may. Whether I write rapidly or slowly depends partly upon the mood of the moment, and partly upon my knowledge or ignorance of what I purpose to write about. My idea of good writing is that it ought to possess all the qualities of good talking and surpass them."

Francis Parkman.

FRANCIS PARKMAN, the historian, "whose literary life-theme has been the relations of the French Colonists of North America with the English and Indians," says: "When fourteen or fifteen years old I had the good luck to be under the direction of Mr. William Russell, a teacher of excellent literary tastes and acquirements. It was his constant care to teach the boys of his class to write good and easy English. One of his methods was to give us lists of words to which we were required to furnish as many synonyms as possible, distinguishing their various shades of meaning. He also encouraged us to write translations, in prose and verse, from Virgil and Homer, insisting on idiomatic English, and criticising in his gentle way anything flowery and bombastic. At this time I read a good deal of poetry, and much of it remains verbatim in my memory. As it included Milton and other classics, I am confident that it has been of service to me in the matter of style. Later on, when in college and after leaving it, I read English prose classics for the express purpose of improving myself in the language. These I take to be the chief

Francis Parkman.

sources of such success as I have had in this particular."

E. E. Hale.

EDWARD EVERETT HALE, the author of that remarkable story, "The Man Without a Country," which teaches so eloquently and pathetically the lesson of love for one's country, is an American preacher, essayist, and novelist of considerable influence and popularity in the United States. He is the recognised enemy of routine, pedantry, and dulness, but his work is marred by a too constant sacrifice of reality in the effort to be sparkling and readable. "I think that when I entered college I wrote as bad English as a boy could write," he says. "But I was then under the charge of Professor Edward T. Channing, a brother of the celebrated Dr. Channing. He read our crude themes, corrected them, and made us sit by his side while he improved them. He laughed at the bombast, struck out the superfluities rigorously, and compelled us to say what we really knew and really thought. I was afterwards, in my father's newspaper office, obliged to do one and another thing which the son of

an editor-in-chief, the manager of his own paper, could be asked to do. There is nothing in the work of a daily paper to which I have not had to put my hand. My father wrote admirable English, and kept a good oversight of the English of his subordinates. I once brought to him a very laudatory book notice. I was but sixteen years old. 'It will do,' he said, 'but you had better leave out all the *verys*.' I think the training a man gets when the compositors wait in a file at the door to take his copy, page by page, as he writes it, is excellent drill in accuracy. In early life I happened to have in my own room some 1,500 books of modern French—the French of what the French call their Renaissance, of the Restoration, and of Louis Philippe's time, De Maistre, George Sand, Hugo's earlier books, and so on. I read them a great deal, and I can detect the influence of them in my own English. But I have never known but one reader who ever observed this. I have always tried to write Saxon rather than Latin, in short words rather than long, and specially in short sentences. You do not ask for such details. I have gone into them at some

E. E. Hale.

E. E. Hale. length in a paper, 'How to Write,' in a little book called 'How To Do It.'"

Sir M. Monier Williams. I will close this chapter by a capital letter from an English author of considerable eminence in his own special sphere of research, Sir MONIER MONIER WILLIAMS. "I attribute a great deal of such success in authorship as I have attained to early training, combined with an intense desire to succeed and a kind of dogged perseverance and power of persistence with which I am naturally gifted. I owe much to the late Dr. Major, who was head-master of King's College School during the time I was there—at a critical period of boy-hood, from fifteen to seventeen. I was in his upper sixth class, and he made us all write an English essay, or Latin prose essay, or English verses, on a given subject once a week. This practice was continued at Balliol College, Oxford, while I was an undergraduate there. The head of the college corrected our weekly essays, and was him-self an excellent Latin scholar. I had also the advantage of an able private tutor, who was the best Latin prose writer of his

day. Practice in Latin prose generally ensures grammatical accuracy and exactness in every other kind of composition. Yet it is true that many masters of English, like the late John Bright, have disclaimed any training in Latin, Greek, or mathematics. *Sir M. Monier Williams.*

"In my opinion, excellence of composition may be achieved by keeping in view six essentials, always presupposing grammatical accuracy as an indispensable basis. These are (1) perspicuity; (2) vigour; (3) simplicity; (4) methodical and logical sequence of sentences and paragraphs; (5) right collocation of words in a sentence; (6) rhythm. I consider perspicuity to be by far the most important of the six. Want of lucidity is a fatal defect. Any would-be author who indulges in long and involved sentences, with too frequent parentheses, is doomed to failure. It seems to me also that looseness in the use of pronouns is one most common source of obscurity. Archbishop Whately's writings furnish a good model of a really lucid style. As to vigour and simplicity, the authorised version of the Bible should, in my opinion, be studied as the best example, as well as for its good old Saxon

Sir M. Monier Williams.

English. Yet it seems to me mere affectation not to make use of the copious supply of words derived from other languages, which the composite structure of our grand mother tongue places at our command. Nor is the frequent employment of apt metaphor to be deprecated; though confusion of different metaphors in the same sentence cannot be too strongly condemned. Abstemiousness in the use of adjectives, without total abstinence, is clearly essential to vigour. I think it was Dr. Johnson who gave a youthful and too florid writer the following valuable hint: 'Read over your composition a day or two after the writing of it, and if you come to any passage which you think particularly fine, strike it out.' The fourth and fifth requisites deserve great attention; they seem to me too commonly neglected. As to rhythm, I think that a rhythmical ear is as necessary for good prose composition as for verse.

"Permit me to conclude by commending Horace's rule, translated by Conington—

> "'O yes, believe me, you must draw your pen
> Not once, nor twice, but o'er and o'er again
> Through what you've written, if you'd entice
> The man who reads you once to read you twice.'

The better to observe this precept I may say that I always put aside what I have written for two or three weeks or more, till it has almost passed out of my mind. Then I take it up and criticise it from the standpoint of an outsider, and I generally strike out at least half. This process is sometimes repeated two or three times, till in the end very little is left of the original composition. My last work, on Buddhism, was so written. Yet, with all this elaboration, the composition should read as if it were written easily and without effort. *Ars est celare artem.*" *Sir M. Monier Williams.*

THE STRENGTH OF SIMPLICITY.

THE STRENGTH OF SIMPLICITY.

UNFORTUNATELY the idea is prevalent with many that simplicity is not strength, that it is far more likely to be the twin sister of shallowness. But if by simplicity we mean the straightforward representing of facts, the honest utterance of honest thought, the clear revealing of some reality within we wish our neighbour to know and share, if it means the clothing of ideas unadorned, save by the chaste adornment truth alone can give, then it will not necessarily mean lack of intellectual depth, nor will it be a synonym for superficiality. A man's writing may be most transparent, he may clothe his thoughts in words so simple a child can understand, yet he may be treating of problems that perplex the wisest, and demand even from the scholar the closest study. The simplicity of words is like the simplicity of food and clothing. A little child eats his food and wears his clothes, and readily understands us when we

speak to him of either. But both food and clothing are complex substances, representing realities the child cannot at present comprehend, and covering depths of information he has not yet fathomed.

The best and profoundest writers are the simplest. Their simplicity is their charm. Clothing the sublimest thoughts in the most direct language, they teach us that the strength of the English tongue is in its short words, chiefly monosyllables of Saxon derivation. Perhaps no influence has been so penetrative and far-reaching in creating the beauty and strength of English literature as that of the authorised version of the Bible. Without it there would have been no Milton, Carlyle, Emerson, or Ruskin. Yet the literary form of that "well of English undefiled" is surely the simplest. Of all writers, Shakespeare is one of the most simple, yet for grace and elegance, for energy and searching power, he certainly stands supreme. It is an egregious mistake to use what Horace calls *verba sesquipedalia*, words a foot and a half long; unless indeed it be the author's purpose to employ language that will best conceal his thoughts.

The one sure test of all written composition is its conformity to the canon of simplicity. Writing that is extravagant, that is eccentric, that is marred by affectation, that is spoiled by striving after effect, that is not simple, direct, natural, lacks the one thing needful to maintain its hold upon men. It is doomed to die, though for a generation it may lead the fashion. Instinctively we expect an author to be perfectly frank with us, to speak to us openly, sincerely, and in a manner we can understand; and he loses all influence over us the moment we are suspicious that his writing savours of under-statement or over-statement, of duplicity or reserve. "Man," says Carlyle, "is everywhere a born enemy of lies."

John Bright.

JOHN BRIGHT was pre-eminently a public speaker. With him oratory was a fine art. For vivacity, incisiveness, purity of diction, he stood supreme amongst the orators of his day. His addresses have been published in book form, and will long continue to be read as literature by all who love our superb mother tongue. His experience may well, therefore, find a place here. "I had no training," he

John Bright. says, "with a view to public speaking. I read good books, the works of good authors; and, I know not why or how, I appreciated simplicity of style, and avoided the use of unnecessary words. Few words, short words, words of what is called Saxon origin, always pleased me, and expressed in the most earnest and forcible manner what I wished to say. Then, further, I have spoken chiefly on great questions in which I have been deeply interested; but I know not why I have surpassed any other speaker, if I have done so. I have only tried to put clear thoughts into clear language, that I might convey to other minds the clear impressions of my own."

Canon Liddon. HENRY PARRY LIDDON, another renowned orator, who must also be classed as one of our best-known authors, may surely be welcomed here. Careful study, deliberate conviction, brave utterance, chastened eloquence, always characterise the Canon's sermons or lectures; and these, of course, constitute the bulk of his writings. He says: "When I was a young man I did not take any pains with my style, though I think that from boyhood good

English prose always gave me pleasure. But a clear style, whether of writing or speaking, is the natural result, as it is the appropriate clothing, of clear thought. The sooner a man gets facts and ideas so presented to his mind, that he knows exactly what they do and what they do not include, what are their frontiers, what is the point at which knowledge becomes conjecture, and conjecture ignorance, the sooner he will speak and write clearly. Of modern writers in England, Cardinal Newman or Mr. John S. Mill appear to me to be the clearest, and on the whole the most powerful, so far as power depends on the manipulation of language. But, *as a rule*, the prose writers of the last century are better models than any of this. To read and reread Addison and Butler, cannot but be instructive in this respect. Hume is forcible; Gibbon is splendid, but to the verge of being turgid. I am, of course, only discussing the style of these writers, as distinct from their subject-matter.

Canon Liddon.

"Of modern languages, French appears to me to be the best for prose, as it is the worst for poetry. French prose is an instrument of unrivalled clearness for the conveyance of

Canon Liddon. thought. Read De Tocqueville, or Caro's Essays, or Saint Beuve's Causenés de Lundí; and you would see what I mean. Sometimes, indeed, the language aims at a precision which the facts or the thought do not warrant, and so betrays us into an idea that things are simpler and clearer than they really are. But an Englishman is not liable to fall into this mistake; and he may gain a great deal in the art of clear expression by reading and studying French prose."

Phillips Brooks. PHILLIPS BROOKS, the celebrated American preacher, writes:—"I have no tale to tell. My only training in composition has been the constant effort for many years to say as clearly and forcibly as I could what was in my mind. I have never written for the sake of writing. If there is any merit in the style of my poor books, it is perhaps to this as much as to anything that it is due. I always find it hard to be autobiographical. Indeed, I seem to myself to have very little to say about my life and ways. They have been very simple, and offer almost nothing for remark."

PHILIP SCHAFF says: "I am a native of Switzerland, and learnt the English language after I was called to a professorship in America. If my style has any merit it is due to the study of the classics, ancient and modern, especially the poets, and to careful elaboration. I write, correct, abridge, enlarge, transpose and reproduce, until I suit my notions of luminous arrangement and rhetorical finish, although I am never quite satisfied. Clearness, precision, brevity and fulness, are in my opinion essential features of good style. I avoid all repetition and useless verbiage, and yet try to give full expression to the idea, and I pay much attention to logical order and artistic grouping. I speak chiefly of historical composition. I cannot say that I have any special model. The Germans are superior in investigating, the English and French in writing history. The former are miners, the latter manufacturers. Church historians fall far behind secular historians in the charms of style. Milman and Stanley are exceptions." *Philip Schaff*

ROBERT COLLYER, the author of several *Robert Collyer.*

Robert Collyer. volumes of sermons and lectures, and one of the foremost preachers in America, says: "I cannot do better than make you an extract from an address I gave to a host of young men some time ago, called, 'From the Anvil to the Pulpit.' Speaking of my home and habit as a boy, I said, 'There was a small shelf of books —Bunyan, Crusoe, Goldsmith's "England," the half of "Sandford and Merton," and the Bible, with lots of pictures, "The Young Man's Best Companion," and Fleetwood's "Life of Christ." Now, do you want to know how I talk to you in this simple Saxon? I read Bunyan, Crusoe, Goldsmith, when I was a boy—morning, noon, and night. All the rest was task work; books of this sort were my delight—with the stories in the Bible, and with Shakespeare, when at last that mighty master came within our doors. They were like a well of pure water, the others were like sand. And this is the first step I seem to have taken of my own free will toward the pulpit.' I think that tells the story of the way I came to write as I do, and to use our simple and sincere Saxon speech. When I have to speak I do not know anything about

the rules of grammar, it seems to be an instinct apart from rules. It is not, however, 'as easy as rolling off a *log*,' as we say, to write so that your work shall be at once clear and strong. Friends will say now and then, 'Your things seem to come easy to you, to say themselves,' when, indeed, they have cost me very severe labour to get them just to my mind." *Robert Collyer.*

ANDREW P. PEABODY, professor in Harvard University, the author of many excellent books upon Christian morals, and a preacher of wide repute, gives a statement of his own literary history and methods. "In my early boyhood I loved to read, and devoted to books most of the time that I might have given, and that I think would have been more wisely given, to recreation. This I say on sanitary grounds, for though I have a very vigorous constitution, I think that my health, or even my life, must have been endangered by the sedentary habits of my boyhood. But I did read continually, and I was guided to, and aided in the reading of, the best books, so that I became early familiar with the vocabulary of pure classical English. *A. P. Peabody.*

A. P. Peabody. I never wrote anything more than a letter till I entered college. There I had a Professor of Rhetoric who was an unsparing critic of our themes, pruning away all superfluous verbiage, ridiculing inflation and bombast, pointing out the incongruity of mixed metaphors, and laying great stress on accuracy and precision. I am sure I derived great benefit from his instruction. Ever since I graduated I have been a writer, first of lectures, for popular audiences; very early, for the press; for more than half a century, of sermons, to the number of several thousands. My habit is to think slowly, and to write rapidly. Were I going to prepare an address on which my reputation depended, I should crave the previous notice of weeks, if possible, of months; but might not put pen to paper till the day before delivery. I keep a subject in my mind till the last moment; brood upon it; if need be, read upon it; shape it, determine in what order I shall treat it, what I can say upon it; in fine, construct the sermon, essay or chapter, in my thought, so that when I come to write, I am simply my own amanuensis. I write as fast as my pen can run, pausing only when the right word does

not present itself spontaneously. When I have finished my work, I read aloud what I have written, and test it by my ear. If a passage sounds harshly, I change the words sufficiently to bring it into melody. If I have used the same word too often, my ear tells me, and I substitute a synonym. When I write for the press my first manuscript generally goes to the printers. When I write a sermon, address, or lecture, I abbreviate many of my words, and write a manuscript of which a printer could make nothing; but if it goes to be printed, I send a literal copy, without any revising or re-writing. Now, if I have any merit as a writer, I ascribe it mainly to two things, first, to my early conversance with the best writers; secondly, to my postponing the work of composition till I have fully thought out what I am going to write." I insert this experience here, because, as an author, Mr. Peabody writes always in a simple and direct style which is greatly pleasing. How such simplicity is attained cannot but be instructive. *A. P. Peabody.*

Benjamin Jowett, of Balliol College, himself one of the noblest masters in the use of *B. Jowett.*

B. Jowett. the English tongue, gives the following advice: "I should recommend any one who wants to learn the art of composing in English to write simply and unaffectedly, not to imitate any English author in particular, any more than in speaking he would imitate the voice or manner of another; and to take all the pains he can even with a common letter. Connection is the soul of good writing. Figures of speech and fine passages had better be cut out."

Dr. A. Kuenen. Dr. A. KUENEN, the great Dutch theologian of Leiden, writes: "I never suspected there was anything in my style deserving particular praise. And this seems to be the opinion of my countrymen, too. The only quality for which they have ever commended it is its clearness and perspicuity. In fact, in writing I do not trouble myself about my style. My only care is to express simply and clearly what I wish to say. I am not a quick writer, and do not find it easy to realise my own idea of perspicuity. Therefore, it is my custom to rewrite my first sketch on draught, whenever the subject is difficult or clearness particularly

desirable. So you see there is no question of any special training. If there be any secret it has been disclosed long ago: never write upon a subject you have not thoroughly studied and mastered so far as your forces go. Or as Horace puts it in the well-known words, '*Cui lecta potenter erit res, nec facundia deseret hunc, nec lucidus ordo.*' " *Dr. A. Kuenen.*

Dr. HARVEY · GOODWIN, Lord Bishop of Carlisle, the author of many theological works, and of several dealing with the study of mathematics, says: " So far as my own style of writing or speaking possesses any special clearness, I think it is chiefly due to my Cambridge mathematical training. In mathematics a man cannot easily deceive himself as to whether that which he writes is correct and clear, and he cannot possibly deceive his tutor. Thus the constant practice of writing out mathematical propositions of much complexity, describing scientific instruments and scientific processes, and the like, leads almost of necessity to clearness of style in more ordinary matters. Moreover, in mathematics a man knows that it is of no use to put pen to *Dr. H. Goodwin.*

Dr. H. Goodwin.

paper to describe a process, prove a theorem, &c., unless his mind is quite clear with regard to the whole subject; and this is an important condition of intelligibility and clearness of style. In writing thus, I know that I am saying that which may not be of much practical utility, because there are many men who have good ability, who have not the mathematical ability. I apprehend that no general rule can be laid down, and that one kind of training may suit one man and not another. I do not know that I can add any more from my own peculiar experience to what will be found in books upon such a subject."

A. K. H. Boyd.

A. K. H. BOYD, the genial and graceful author of "Recreations of a Country Parson," says: "My experience is that every writer has his own methods, and that nobody can help another in the work of composition. Every one must find one for himself. I had no special training further than that those who study at a Scotch University have the pen in their hand continually, and thus learn by experience. All counsels to study eminent authors and form a style such as theirs appear

to me to be rank nonsense. Let a youth make his meaning clear, and try to be interesting. As Sidney Smith said, 'Every style is good except the tiresome.'" *A. K. H. Boyd.*

"I am afraid that I can lay down no 'royal road' to the acquisition of a good style," says GEORGE RAWLINSON, the eminent historian of ancient monarchies of the Eastern world. "I can only say, read the best authors attentively, the *very* best—Bacon, Locke, Hume, Berkeley, Jeremy Taylor, and of moderns, Walter Scott, Bulwer, Thackeray, Ruskin, Froude; and practise constantly. Do not attempt any imitation of any particular author or authors, but let your style form itself. Lay a good foundation of grammatical knowledge, so as to be quite sure of your grammar; then avoid complicated sentences; and, as a rule, avoid long sentences. Finally, have something to say, make up your mind exactly what it is you want to say, and you will probably not have much difficulty in saying it. Individually, however, I have never written by rule, but as the subject seemed to suggest, as the thoughts came into my mind. I write rather slowly, *G. Rawlinson.*

G. Rawlinson.

make very few corrections; and those chiefly to avoid the recurrence of the same word, or even of a similarly sounding word, at too short an interval. Finally, I should recommend the use of words that come to us from the Anglo-Saxon in preference to those derived from the Latin; but with the proviso, that a Latin word should not be rejected, if more expressive than the Saxon, or more familiar or clearer; and that when a similar idea has to be repeated within a short space, the Latin words should be even sought out, and used conjointly with the Anglo-Saxon to produce variety. The richness of the English language consists very much in its having a double origin, and so a large supply of synonyms, or quasi synonyms, quite different in sound and etymology."

We now deal with quite a different class of writers. Still, it will be seen that, vary as they may in the subject-matter of their work, their methods of labour have much in common, while their purpose is always the same—to be simple, in the sense of being clear, perspicuous, transparent, intelligible. Take, first, the well-known "Autocrat,"

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, philosopher, poet, humorist—the author of the inimitable "Breakfast-table" series—writes succinctly, clearly, vividly, and has always a charming story to tell us, or a valuable lesson to teach. "I was taught for five years at a private school," he says, "and passed one year at Phillips's Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. I graduated at Harvard University, the oldest and largest educational establishment of America. But I never learned how to write by any training. I think I learned something of how *not* to write from the teachings of Professor Channing, brother of the famous William Ellery Channing. After leaving college I followed my own instincts in writing, not having any one model, so far as I know, though of course many influences of other writers show themselves in my books. You will find it a safe rule never to write except when you have something worth saying, and then to say it simply—as Addison wrote in *The Spectator*, Goldsmith in the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' and Franklin in his Autobiography." *O. W. Holmes.*

HENRY JAMES, the novelist, is an author *Henry James.*

Henry James.

whose work is marked by an extraordinary refinement and finish, though it lacks the fire, the abandon, the sentiment and emotion, we have a right to expect from a master hand. He says, "The question of literary form interests me indeed, but I am afraid I can give no more coherent or logical account of any little success I may have achieved in the cultivation of it than simply in saying that I have always been *fond* of it. If I manage to write with any clearness or concision or grace, it is simply that I have always tried. It isn't easy, and one must always try; for the traps that newspaper scribbling, and every other vulgarity, set for us to-day are innumerable. It is an advantage when the sense of certain differences awakes early. I had that good fortune, which, however, made me compose with mortal slowness at first. But it gave birth to the idea and the ideal of form, and that is a godsend even if one slowly arrives at it. A simple style is really a complicated thing, and in the way of an effort an evolution. I am afraid mine, if I have one, is simply taste and patience."

Colonel T. W. Knox.

COLONEL THOMAS W. KNOX is the author of a number of story-books for boys—widely circulated in the United States—which are certainly among the most instructive and attractive writings for young people ever issued. "I had no special training for my present work," he says, "but I consider my long experience in journalism, writing often under pressure and against time, a most excellent schooling. Time does not permit a newspaper worker to rewrite, hardly to retouch, and consequently I learned to do my best work at once. I compose more slowly and more carefully now than when writing for the daily Press, but never rewrite. I compose my work as I go along, and when, having finished a chapter, I read it over, I do not change a dozen words. In correcting proof-sheets I only alter a few lines in an entire volume. However familiar I may be with a country I am about to describe, I do not begin writing until I have devoted weeks and months to a special study of it. Books, newspapers, magazines, individuals are laid under contribution, and acknowledged in preface or text. Work does not begin until I am thoroughly saturated with

Colonel T. W. Knox.

my subject, so thoroughly, in fact, that exudation has set in, and I find myself experimenting with anecdotes about that country upon the patience of my friends. Since 1878 I have done all my composition for the Press with the Remington type-writer. I can write about 25 per cent. faster with it than with the pen, and about 100 per cent. more legibly. For the first three months it was slow work, and I was inclined to throw the machine out of the window. But at present the only money that would induce me to part with it is a sufficient amount to enable me to retire altogether from the effort to make a living."

E. P. Roe.

E. P. ROE is said to be the most popular American novelist of the day. His books, written in simple, graceful English, are full of a moral and spiritual stimulus, which cannot but be productive of great good amongst their vast constituency of readers here and in the United States. His recent death has been a sad loss to literature, and to the many lovers of his charming tales. "I fear that I cannot write," he says, "anything that will be of much aid to you. I had no special training

E. P. Roe.

for literary work, except as a somewhat large experience during the war, and out in the world generally, has given me knowledge of human nature. The impulse to write came in middle life, and I have merely followed it. Of course those who become writers must have some natural aptitude. Beginning with this, they must learn to think clearly, to have something definite in their minds, then to express it in the simplest, clearest words in their vocabulary. A clear running brook is the best teacher of style. There is a quick forward movement—but not measured or monotonous movement—while the water is so limpid that everything is seen through the crystal medium. It seems to me that the best style is that which reveals the writer's thoughts so easily, plainly, and musically that the reader becomes engrossed in the thought or story and forgets the writer. Therefore, have something to tell, and tell it clearly, simply, without a trace of affectation or conscious effort at fine writing. I should advise the study of examples in this perfection of art."

Edgar Fawcett.

EDGAR FAWCETT, a novelist of much power

Edgar Fawcett.

—widely read across the Atlantic, but little known here, except through the popular American magazines, to which he often contributes—writes to say, "In early life I had the usual schoolboy's training as regards 'English undefiled'; and afterwards, at Columbia College, New York, whence I was graduated in 1867, I had the advantage of hearing many lectures on literature from Dr. C. Murray Nairne—a Scotchman, of decided learning and ability. Still, what I have gained, if the gain be of any worth at all, has come to me, I should say, through devout observation of good models and assiduous care in the structure of my written sentences. Macaulay, unless I am much mistaken, first wakened me to a sense of style in prose, and the immortal Tennyson in verse. I remember that I set myself three rules—to be, first lucid, second impersonal, and third melodious. A great deal of my youthful writing horrifies me now to examine it; but fortunately it was largely anonymous, or else of a quality which the world of contemporary readers could easily forget. I believe in observing rules. Good 'rhetorics' are admirable guides, and there is no literary genius that

cannot be aided in closely studying these accumulated syntheses of capable and intelligent teachers. If they do not teach us to write, they teach us how not to write; and that is always a most important step in the formation of a fluent, nervous, and amiable style. It is always pleasant for me to hear a genial voice from England, which I love and revere for her great literary past more than any words of mine could express. I only regret that I should be so ill-known amongst her vast throngs of intelligent readers; but, alas! I write in my fiction only of New York; and this big, crowded, prosaic town is a matter of as much indifference to her, I fear, as some of the sprawling, dull, Western cities are to New York." *Edgar Fawcett.*

W. S. GILBERT, the author of the delightful "Bab Ballads," and the long series of light operas and sparkling plays which have made his name a household word amongst us, is afraid he cannot claim to have made any special study of composition in his youth. "I have always endeavoured," he adds, "to express my meaning in the most simple and *W. S. Gilbert.*

W. S. Gilbert.

direct fashion, frequently writing a single sentence over and over again, with the view to ascertain in how few words my full meaning could be adequately expressed. I have always eschewed 'tall writing,' which I look upon as a pitfall into which most beginners are apt to stumble; and I have endeavoured rather to interest my readers by the subject-matter of my work, than to excite their admiration by ornate and flowery periods. In fact, I think a writer's style should be guided by causes analogous to those which regulate a gentleman's dress; if it attracts the attention of the non-critical reader, it is probably because it is disfigured by glaring errors in taste. The English of the late Tudor and early Stuart periods may, I think, be studied with the utmost advantage; for simplicity, directness, and perspicuity there is, in my opinion, no existing work to be compared with the historical books of the Bible."

Thomas Hughes.

THOMAS HUGHES, the author of that noble story, "Tom Brown's School Days," writes: "I never gave myself any special training in writing English beyond this, that when I

began to write I used to go over my MS. carefully, change every Latin word for an English one (*e.g.*, 'reliable' for 'trustworthy,' 'development' for 'unfolding,' &c.), and cut out every adjective or other word not really necessary to express what I had to say. I don't believe that any amount of copying will make another man's style natural to you; and if not natural, it won't really be as good as your own. But, indeed, any style is good if you have something you have a call to say, and men ought to hear; and no style is good if you hav'nt. I am afraid that I can give you no further hints on the art of composition, but wish your young men all success in learning to say in the best way what they have got to say, and to hold their tongues and let the cream rise at all other times." *Thomas Hughes.*

JOHN STUART BLACKIE, the large-hearted and genial Edinburgh professor, writes to say: "I never made any special study of style, and whatever virtue I may have in this way grew up as my mind grew, unconsciously. Style seems to depend on three things, (1) a mental attitude and character, (2) a familiarity *J. S. Blackie.*

J. S. Blackie.

with the best authors, (3) dexterity in the use of words, acquired by constant practice. So we must learn to speak by speaking, as we learn to walk by walking, or to dance by dancing. The main thing in writing is to have distinct, and clear, and well-marshalled ideas, and then to express them simply and without affectation. This forms what we may call the bones of a good style. Then you must study to give colour by apt images, and warmth by natural passion and earnestness. The music of words and the cadence of sentences is a matter which depends on the ear. Above all things monotony in the form of the sentences is to be avoided; variety means wealth and always pleases. Condensation also ought to be particularly studied, and a loose, rambling, ill-compacted form of sentence avoided. But it is difficult to give advice in such a matter. Every man must have his own style, as he has his own face and his own features."

D. C. Murray.

D. CHRISTIE MURRAY, whose well-ripened imagination, finished workmanship, and vivid character-portraits mark him out as a novelist

of high order, has something to say upon our topic worth consideration. "I have always thought there is only one royal road to style, and that is to see with perfect clarity what one desires to say. When once that is done, the expression is a matter of ease. The next secret is to find the shortest, simplest form of expression. A man has other duties with respect to literature than to make himself intelligible to the crowd. 'The words of the wise and their dark sayings,' you will remember. There are some things which cannot be made comprehensible to the common mind; but the affectation of obscurity, the wrapping a mere farthing's-worth of meaning in a whole bale of verbiage, is a fool's trick and no more. I remember that when Mr. Commissioner Kerr issued an address to the electors of Wednesbury he said, 'I have no time to be brief.' That is a pungent sentence. Brevity, clarity, accuracy, fulness, these are the things to try for. I am not in the least setting these down in accordance with their importance. Truth comes first here as in everything. I remember an excellent epithet in a book of American travels, by

D. C. Murray.

D. C. Murray.

Mrs. Butler (Miss Fanny Kemble), I believe, 'The desolate, thread-bare look of the winter woods.' That may have come in a flash, or she may have had to search for it; but it is descriptively true, and conveys also a sense of the poverty of winter nature in contrast with the splendour of her summer prosperity. The poetical word is never the untrue or over-strained word, but always that which presents the actual verity most clearly. Take Shakespeare's lines:

> 'There's not the smallest orb that thou behold'st
> But in his circle like an angel sings
> Still quivering to the young-eyed cherubim!'

Here, where all is beautiful, there is nothing to match the perfect inspiration of the epithet in the third line—'the *young-eyed* cherubim.' The poet looked at his own imagination till the starry eyes, alight with immortal youth, flashed into his own. He *saw* and he could say. The insight of a profound and lofty imagination is not a thing to be got at by training, but the humblest student can look at his own thought till it grows clear, or at least clearer.

"Bearing this in mind always, the one aid

is thoughtful and discriminate reading. There is a book of Leigh Hunt's, called 'Fancy and Imagination,' which was of prodigious use to me in my boyhood in teaching me what qualities are truly admirable in poetry. The same qualities are admirable in prose. Every modern man's style is a thing of shreds and patches—only when a man happens to have a personality of his own he absorbs a thousand exotic excellences, the mind digesting them as the body digests beef and beer—they grow to be an actual part of his mental muscles; whereas, in the case of an unoriginal man, they can but reproduce themselves, or get reproduced unchanged. Sometimes, critically examining my own style, I find signs of every master I have ever studied. Charles Reade said of 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' 'I have milked three hundred cows into my bucket.' But then the butter he churned was his own, and as one of the personages at the tea-table in 'Alice in Wonderland' observed, 'it was the very best butter.'

D. C. Murray.

"To try to be striking, new, fine, is all faulty. Try to see clearly, to speak justly, and you are on the road to a style. 'Idiom is the

D. C. Murray.

cream of language.' Use common forms for thoughts which have often been expressed. I remember one man saying of another, that 'he never clothed a modicum of meaning in a long array of misapplied polysyllables,' an excellent example of the vice he said his friend was free from. Avoid foreign phrases, and scraps of the dead languages. There is nothing which can be said at all which cannot be said in English. Be simple and unpretentious. If you get all your goods into the shop window, you have but a poor establishment. Throw fear and vanity alike to the winds while writing. Say the thing you see as you see it, and bend the whole power of your mind upon it until you see it well. Avoid newspaper English like a pest. Study the Bible, Bunyan, Defoe, and mark their simplicity, their straightforwardness, their accuracy in the choice of words. Few things are so wonderful as language; few things better worth studying. Yet we cannot study language except in the works of its great masters, and studying it aright we grow friendly and familiar with noble thoughts and beautiful fancies; we decorate the bare four walls of daily life with

exquisite pictures ; we make friends with all sorts and conditions of people, emperors, queens, poets, philosophers, wits, heroes—the height of good company." *D. C. Murray*

E. FRANCES POYNTER, the author of a few well-written and most interesting stories, says she had not the good fortune to receive any particular training in the art of composition in early life. "My chief method, I think, has been a continued effort after simple and adequate expression. But since all practice has a tendency to reduce itself to rules, there are two or three points that I have come to consider it necessary to keep in view in writing, and that I should, myself, recommend to the notice of beginners. The first is to have a distinct view of what has to be described, and a distinct understanding of what has to be explained. This remark is very much in the nature of a truism; but most writers, I imagine, have had experience of the temptation on occasion to make words take the place of ideas when gaps occur in the mental vision. Having arrived at this clear vision or understanding, it should be set forth *Miss E. F. Poynter.*

Miss E. F. Poynter.

in as few words as possible. This does not of course necessarily imply that only a few words should be used, since some subjects require a good many for their adequate expression; but only that no more words should be employed than are strictly necessary. As a rule, I think, one finds that the best writing tends to condensation and terseness; that three adjectives, for instance, justly placed by a master, will do the service of a dozen used by an unskilful writer. I do not myself, though I believe on this point I differ from some excellent authorities, hold the use of a very large and varied vocabulary to be an especial gain. However, a writer should be in possession of as large a vocabulary as possible, so as to select the word best suited to his purpose without falling into triteness and vulgarity. Simplicity, it seems to me, is always an excellent guide to follow, whether in the choice of words, or the construction of sentences, where those words should, so far as possible, be placed in juxtaposition that have the closest relation to each other. This rule, however, I do not find it possible to follow invariably, as something must be conceded to rhythm. And, in regard

to rhythm, that is so much a question of ear that I do not know how any rule could be given beyond the counsel to educate the sense by reading the best prose and avoiding what is inferior. Briefly, then, I may say that the rules I find most serviceable are—to see with clearness, to express with simplicity and precision, to cultivate distinction in the choice of a vocabulary, to educate an ear for rhythm. To put these rules into practice I know of no art but the art of taking pains. I myself rewrite and correct a good deal, others do not; but I believe every writer should start with the conviction that there is a right word and a right phrase for everything, and that no trouble should be spared to find them out." *Miss E. F. Poynter.*

Mrs. ALEXANDER (Annie Hector), the author of "The Wooing O't" and other spirited, dramatic stories, written with animation, force, and vivid painting of character, says: "I have been trying to remember how I came to think of writing, for in truth there has been little or no method in anything I have ever done. I suppose an ear for music and some imagination enable me to write. Having no play- *Mrs. Alexander.*

Mrs. Alexander.

fellows, I turned, almost as a child, to books, and steeped myself in Scott, Washington Irving, Byron, Cowper, Burns, Cooper, Moore, Robertson, Rollin, &c. I saw the scenes and knew the people they described. This was the best education I had; for fifty years ago young ladies' studies were curious examples of how 'not to do it.' I am not aware that I ever studied how to express myself, or followed any rules, nor had I any literary friends; but one day a couple of characters took possession of me, and I was obliged to put them on paper, where they dictated their own terms. With practice I acquired better methods. Always, however, I think of my characters first, then the incidents come, and I plan my plot, trying hard to be as natural as possible. Plots are growing more difficult of construction every day from the crowds of new writers and the multitudes of fresh complications they invent. But life is inexhaustible! So far as I can see there are no rules to be laid down for composition, beyond what the grammar of our tongue provides, an earnest conviction of the reality of one's characters, and a sincere effort to tell one's story in the clearest and simplest

language. The more you feel, the more forcibly you will express yourself on paper. The best means of fructifying the intellect are wide, indiscriminate reading, a large and varied intercourse with society, and above all, sympathy, which reveals to you the hearts of your fellows." *Mrs. Alexander.*

GERALD MASSEY, poet, mystic, author of "A Book of Beginnings," says: "I have no story to tell and no secret to communicate. I never tried to imitate anybody, and have never been conscious of any aim in the matter of style. I began with writing verses, which is a very good preparatory school for writing prose. Not that one would expect a man to write good prose because he might have written bad verse. But it teaches concentration, and necessitates some thought in the process, even where there may be little in the brain. I should think it would be fatal, in writing as in manner, to attempt to 'put on style.' Better begin by saying what you have to say in the simplest sincerity, in the fewest and shortest words. The use of latinisation should be left to the later sense of rhythm and music in *Gerald Massey.*

Gerald Massey.

words. The primary thing is to think clearly, and to have the data to go upon. Force of style can only come from force of character, with plenty of practice. Many a glib sentence will have been rolled in a writer's mind for hours before it becomes a bullet or a polished pebble. For myself, I have come to think much less of the mere literary mind, and more of the substance or matter of thought. Then again, I hold that we can draw more from the spiritual world than from all the books ever written in this. But the only way to establish that *rapport* is by devotion to the fact, by having a perfect passion for the truth, and by uttering it with the most unselfish sincerity. Then the style may be left to take care of itself."

Coventry Patmore.

A poet of the more homely type, COVENTRY PATMORE, also affirms that he has never thought about or cultivated style. "I believe the one secret of good writing," he says, "is to have perfectly clear thoughts and vivid impressions of things, and never to be contented with any inadequate expression of them."

"For precepts of style," says GOLDWIN SMITH, "you must go to the masters of style, and for lessons in the art of composition you must go to artists. My only rule is to know what I mean to say, to say it, and have done with it. Clearness and conciseness are within the reach of all of us, though grandeur, beauty, and piquancy are not." *Goldwin Smith.*

ERNEST MYERS, an accomplished critic and an admirable poet, attributes whatever simplicity and force there may be in his style to the effect of early studies in translating passages from the masterpieces of the great Greek and Latin authors. "Next to this," he says, "I think my style may have benefited by the fact that I write slowly and seldom. There is inconvenience and disadvantage in this, but at the same time it forces one, so to speak, to make one's words tell. I strike out superfluous words, perhaps sometimes to the extent of producing austerity in poetry and over-condensation in prose, eschew Latin words where Saxon will do, and if I use Latin words, keep the full etymological sense in view so far as may be done without pedantry. I am naturally *Ernest Myers.*

Ernest Myers. impatient of redundancy and repetition in what I read, and of course in writing one tries to satisfy one's own taste. Among living prose writers I should be inclined to name Mr. Goldwin Smith and Cardinal Newman as the finest and best in style. In poetry I think that I have myself been more influenced by Milton than any other English poet."

Leslie Stephen. LESLIE STEPHEN, a scholarly writer, who may perhaps be best classed amongst the historians of literature, thinks that his own experience may be summed up in the Needy Knife-grinder's statement: "Story, God bless you, I have none to tell, Sir!" He says, "I did not take to literature until I was over thirty, and then, less from love of writing than from external compulsion. I had taken a considerable interest in certain studies of the more or less philosophical kind, and I had gone through our good old Cambridge mathematical course. When I had to write, I simply tried to say what I had to say as clearly as I could; much in the same way as if I had been going in for the Tripos. It scarcely occurred to me that there was such

a thing as style as distinct from matter; and whatever style I may have has come to me, like Dogberry's reading and writing, by nature. I do not perceive that I have anything to be called a style, as Mr. Morley, for example, or Mr. Pater, or Mr. Stevenson have styles: and if anybody should be so misguided as to wish to write like me, he must do it by thinking of nothing except clearness and simply expressing his meaning. I am far from recommending my own example for everybody. I believe that study of style, as style, may be useful for men with a talent that way; but I must leave it to more successful writers to explain how it is to be carried on. My plan, if it is to be called a plan, is, I fancy, not a bad one for the ordinary writer." *Leslie Stephen.*

W. E. H. LECKY, a historian of wide research and brilliant style, never made any methodical study of composition. "I have always cared much for style," he says, "and have endeavoured to improve my own by reading a great deal of the best English and French prose. In writing, as in music, much of the perfection of style is a question of ear; *W. E. H. Lecky.*

W. E. H. Lecky. but much also depends on the ideal the writer sets before himself. He ought, I think, to aim (1) at the greatest possible simplicity and accuracy of expression, (2) at vivacity and force, (3) at condensation. The last two heads will usually be found to blend; for condensation, when it is not attained at the sacrifice of clearness, is the great secret of force. I should say, from my own experience, that most improvements of style are of the nature either of condensation or of increased accuracy and delicacy of distinction. Many separate fibres of thought are apt to get tangled or massed together in vague and general expressions, and it is the task of a good writer to count them out, giving each its distinct individuality. He should write no phrase which does not convey a clear and definite meaning to his mind, should endeavour to make the words fit as closely as possible to the meaning, and should wage an unsparing war against redundancies, against slang, and against merely conventional and unmeaning phrases."

S. R. Gardiner. Another powerful living historian, SAMUEL R. GARDINER, says: "I fear I can throw very

S. R. Gardiner.

little light on the subject, as when I was at Winchester and Oxford it was not the fashion to teach the writing of English in any way. I have simply tried to know what I want to say, and to say it so that others should know what it is; and also to have clearly in my own mind the thread of my narrative, so as to put things in their proper relations to one another."

Sir J. Lubbock.

Brief replies from two scientific authors may be inserted here. SIR JOHN LUBBOCK says: "Beyond carefully reading our best writers and endeavouring to make myself as clear as possible, I have followed no rule. My impression is that there is no better way to improve one's style than by the study of the greatest masters of English."

St. Geo. Mivart.

ST. GEORGE MIVART writes: "I have never in my life considered the construction of a sentence I wrote; what has come, has come without conscious effort. Though I went through the usual Greek and Latin authors, I was never a good classical scholar. If I am clear, I think it must be due to a habit of mind

St. Geo. Mivart.

which has always led me to try and acquire precise and accurate ideas about any subject I inquired into, to get to the bottom of things as far as possible. As a boy, I was particularly fond of Euclid, and the judgment passed on my scientific work by a man well able to judge (the late Professor Peters, of Berlin) was, that it was 'thorough.' This he expressed one day to my friend, Professor Flower, of the British Museum, who told me of it. When I write I scribble off my thoughts as quickly as possible, and then for the most part rewrite."

John Burroughs.

JOHN BURROUGHS, a gifted American essayist, whose charming studies have a wide circle of readers here as well as in the United States, writes to say: "I suppose the secret of whatever there is valuable in one's style is quite incommunicable: it lies above and beyond one's will or one's conscious attainment. In my own case I only know that I always do the best work I am capable of at the time, and never force myself to write against the mood. I must feel the thing first, and then I can say it; I must love the subject upon which I write, it must adhere to me, and for the time being

John Burroughs.

become a part of me. I write only in the morning hours and when I am in perfect health, and for only three or four months in the year—fall and winter. My youth and early training made me acquainted with things, and not with books. I was a farm boy, and my love of nature is as old as I am. My desire to write began when I was sixteen or seventeen. I got hold of *The Spectator*, and read it closely; then Dr. Johnson's Essays, and read and studied them; then Emerson's Essays. These last influenced me most deeply; I lived upon them for years. Shakespeare, too, I studied, and Carlyle, and all the masters of expression I could lay hands on. The great classics I have read only in translations. A man, to write well, must be perfectly sincere and honest with himself, and try to express only what he feels and knows. Earnestness is the great secret of forcible composition. I should advise the young to study Matthew Arnold, who, I think, is one of the great masters of English style. Lucidity—*lucidity*, that is the word, clear as the open daylight from beginning to end. Unless the idea is as plain and palpable, as real in the

John Burroughs.

print, as are the trees in the field or the men in the street, the work is faulty."

C. D. Warner.

CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER, one of the brightest and most interesting essayists of America, writes: "Most people, I suspect, begin to write before they have anything to say. I did. I remember that at the age of sixteen I thought a great deal more of how a thing should be said than what to say. I used to have a habit of walking up and down and composing a sentence, with attention to its symmetrical quality, before writing it. I practised this a good deal, and though I was reading Irving at the time and was influenced by him, I did not acquire his diffuseness and facility of enlarging. During my college days I think I was benefited more by my correspondence than anything else. I wrote a letter every day, as good a letter as I could write, for most of my correspondents were ladies of cultivation, considerably older than I. There is nothing so good as this sort of letter-writing to give flexibility to style. Later on in life, when I became an editor, and was subject to the limitations of space, I perhaps got into the

bad habit of condensing too much for clearness, and lost something of my power of amplification. But since I have had, or thought I had, something to say, I have had only one rule, to say it in the simplest way, choosing always an adequate, short word instead of a long one, and one commonly in use rather than one erudite. I have steadily endeavoured to lessen the number of my adjectives, and to avoid what is called fine writing. I have tried also to eschew the use of quotations; that is, the expressing of my thoughts in phrases the memory may suggest, which is often the easiest way. While a writer ought not to strain for brilliant expression, he ought not to fall into the inevitable commonplace which memory prompts. If a person has a clear thought that is his own, he will be apt to use language freely in expressing it; and his chief care, it seems to me, should be to send his thought as straight to the brain of another as he can. There is no excuse for obscurity or pedantry. I believe in a personal style, and I acknowledge its charm. It should be a thing of the person, never copied. Reading the best English certainly tends to make one

C. D. Warner.

C. D. Warner.

write correctly, but the style should come out of one's own nature in a sincere effort to express oneself. No imitation, however good, ever yet added anything permanent to literature."

William Minto.

The series of contributions contained in this chapter may appropriately be brought to a close by some valuable suggestions generously placed at our disposal by WILLIAM MINTO, Professor at Aberdeen University, and the author of several books, amongst them a few notable novels, written with great ability and charm of style. He says: "As a professor, part of whose business is to lecture on the principles of composition, I think there is some use in advice on the subject. Only I draw a clear distinction. The one kind of composition for which rules and principles are of service, is composition whose aim is to instruct or communicate knowledge. If one's object is to entertain, or even to rouse, to touch the feelings in any way, I doubt whether one is not hampered rather than helped by any rules that are not of one's own devising. Therein the writer must minister to himself.

Of course there are principles in art, but I doubt whether the learner can get much from the formal statement of them. *William Minto.*

"But if it is a question of communicating knowledge, the case is different. Given a certain series of ideas to be passed from one to another, bit by bit, unit by unit, as a crowd passes one by one through a narrow opening, there must be one order better than another. A theatre can be emptied more quickly by good arrangement than if the matter is left to chance. And in writing, the problem is still more difficult than emptying a theatre, or bottle of water. You have to get your water out of one narrow-necked bottle into another, spilling as little as possible by the way.

"There are one or two general principles that I am in the habit of laying down to my students. One is not to overcrowd, not to try to say too much in a sentence or a paragraph, or even an essay or a sermon. Have one, or a few, leading ideas, and stick to them as closely as possible. Whatever you bring in, see that it has some connection with your main theme. But, indeed, it has always seemed to me that nearly every principle of

William Minto.

composition might be deduced by a man for himself if he bore in mind the cardinal maxim, that the purpose of writing is not to express thought but to communicate knowledge, and that that writing is best which gets its meaning most easily and expeditiously into the mind of the reader. It is the reader's ease and convenience that have to be considered. The right words and the right sentences should be in their right places, and the places are right when what you want to be prominent and well in the reader's eye is prominent. Theoretically, therefore, though I fear I seldom have realised the ideal myself, a writer ought, before his final draft at any rate, to have in his mind clearly what he wants to say, and then to order it so that it shall most easily and clearly find its way into the minds of his readers.

"This, of course, is a counsel of perfection, and I fear I have not followed it in my rambling and disjointed remarks to yourself. John Bright's speeches have always struck me as being among the most structurally perfect things in our language. He seems always to have known before he began how he was

to end, and he seems to have also acted on the principle of not trying to pack too much matter into a speech. I must again say, however, that if entertainment is a writer's purpose, all the obvious rules of clear and coherent statement seem to me, although I cannot myself, owing to ingrained habit, get rid of them, to be a mistake. The only sufficient rule is to say what comes first into one's head, and trust for coherence to the suggestions of casual association. I remember once listening to a very clear, plain, closely-connected speech, all bearing on one head, simple enough too, and not without variety. When I came out I asked one of the audience, a very intelligent working-man, what he thought of it. It was good, he said, very good; and then, after a little hesitation, added, 'perhaps too good.' How so? I asked. He had some little difficulty in explaining his objection, but it appeared that one thing was too closely connected with another, so that it was rather a strain to follow the speaker. My friend quite admitted that this was the proper thing, to be logical and coherent, but said that he preferred things thrown in here

William Minto.

William Minto.

and there, familiar things that one could cheer at.

"Any success I may have in that way I believe I owe mainly to my having been a pupil of Professor Bain's. The chapters in his 'Rhetoric,' on paragraph construction, and on exposition, seem to me to be of the greatest use to anybody who wishes to compose clearly for purposes of conveying information. I have also been an admiring student of Matthew Arnold ever since I heard him deliver the first of his lectures on 'Culture' at Oxford."

A PROTEST AGAINST OBSCURITY.

A PROTEST AGAINST OBSCURITY.

THIS is but a continuation of the subject-matter of the previous chapter, the negative side of which that was the positive. A break in the general subject of clearness may not be unacceptable to the reader; at least it will give an opportunity of calling attention to a fault in authorship which cannot but prove fatal. We expect an author to speak to us with distinctness and precision. If he is convinced that he has something of value to say, we have the right to ask that he shall say it clearly and in a way that best conveys his meaning. Any obscurity, vagueness, or uncertainty in his mode of expression; any darkening of counsel with perplexing utterance, at once forces us to conclude that the author does not himself know exactly what he thinks, and hence does not know just what to say. The moment any such conclusion is reached, the writer's influence over us has gone.

The authors most widely read, and those who maintain unchallenged their supremacy in the realm of literature, are those about whose thought and purpose there is no uncertainty. This is assuredly one of the essential elements of Homer's power and immortality, of Michael Cervantes', of Shakespeare's, of Daniel Defoe's, of Hawthorne's. Because they express noble thoughts, and picture charming scenes, and relate facts and experiences without one touch of vagueness, they never lose their fascination. They speak to us as we instinctively feel they ought, telling us simply, honestly, straightforwardly what they wish to convey to our minds. Their purpose is distinct; therefore their utterances are so. Clear thought makes clear speech.

So of present-day authors. They are the most read who are the least obscure. Tennyson, Ruskin, Cardinal Newman, and other of our best-known writers, are living witnesses of the fact that perfect clearness of expression is compatible with the very highest power. A style may be eminently lucid, yet singularly suggestive. We do not ask an author to overcome all difficulties of thought for us. That

would be asking him to become like a foolishly indulgent mother, who spoils her children for the sake of pleasing them. Literary excellence is tested, not by leaving a reader lulled intellectually into a state of contented repose, but by awakening emotions and sentiments not previously felt. The effort to avoid obscurity must not carry a writer into an insipid profuseness of small talk, such as that Douglas Jerrold complains of when he says that certain authors deal with truth as though it were like gold, making a little of it go a great way, hammering it out until one grain covers a folio. A writer's every sentence may ring with a great purpose, may be weighty with a solid meaning, may be trenchant, penetrating, subtle, and yet be clear as the sunlight.

What is the value of thought, howsoever noble, when expressed in enigmatical forms! In one of his splendid stories George Meredith thus describes the style of an author, whom he does not, of course, name: "His favourite author was one writing of heroes, in (so she esteemed it) a style resembling either early architecture or utter dilapidation, so loose and rough it seemed; a wind-in-the-orchard style,

that tumbled down here and there an appreciable fruit with uncouth bluster; sentences without commencements running to abrupt endings and smoke, like waves against a sea wall; learned dictionary words giving a hand to street slang, and accents falling on them haphazard, like slant rays from driving clouds; all the pages in a breeze, the whole book producing a kind of electrical agitation in the mind and the joints." Whenever we meet with a mode of expression at all akin to that so aptly described by Mr. Meredith we can do no other than regard it as disgraceful to the author and insulting to the reader.

The following contributions will show how deeply our present-day writers feel upon this subject, and how painstaking are their endeavours to avoid any approach to obscurity in their own work.

Lewis Morris.

LEWIS MORRIS, the author of "The Epic of Hades" and several volumes of poems written with great power and marked by a singular penetration and musical quality in style, says: "I am afraid I have very little to say as to the art of expression, and indeed

Lewis Morris.

I generally fail to satisfy myself in prose, and often in verse. I think, however, that it is a good rule to have something to say, not to write at all unless you have, and when you do write to use the fewest possible words ; then to go over every sentence or every verse with a view to discover whether any possibility of obscurity or mistaken meaning remains, and if so, to alter it at once to a clearer form of expression. I have always tried to do this, and have been much helped by my experience as a conveyancing counsel of long practice in draughting legal instruments. In a deed or will, where ambiguity of meaning might involve the loss of thousands of pounds to innocent people, and where no assistance is to be derived from punctuation, clearness of expression is an absolute necessity. As regards obscurity in verse, it is, in my view, a fatal error, and is, curiously enough, associated with the decadence of every literature. I do not believe Mr. Browning could have written clearly if he would, and as he is unlikely to find imitators I would not willingly say a word against a style which is weighted with so much noble yet difficult

Lewis Morris.

thought. Another man of genius, Mr. George Meredith, has found a way to write not only obscure verse, but, in his later works, prose so extraordinarily difficult in thought and expression that one may read page after page without the remotest glimmering sense of a possible meaning, which nevertheless doubtless exists. I hope you will warn your readers against these excesses, pardonable it may be to a certain extent in their authors, but certain to lead in the case of imitators to absolute failure, and, if they should become general, to the ultimate destruction of all that is best in the noblest literature since that of ancient Greece."

Charles Mackay.

CHARLES MACKAY, a poet whose songs will be remembered with delight, and a writer of prose full of interest and literary charm, always made the avoidance of obscurity the *sine quâ non* of his work. "I have striven in all I have written," he said, "to express my meaning tersely, correctly, and elegantly; to use no word that could be misunderstood by intelligent and cultivated readers; to avoid two words or expletives where one would suffice;

to be simple rather than ornate ; to be clear and consistent in metaphor, where metaphor seemed needful either to add force or dignity to the phraseology, or to render more apparent the truth which I wished to inculcate or the falsehood I wished to confute. I never indulged myself in what is called 'fine writing,' when simple writing would answer the purpose. Perhaps I learned to form my style involuntarily, by reading the noble, old English of the Bible, and the plain, honest English of Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress' and Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe,' and to polish it by the more classical English of Shakespeare's dramas, Pope's poetry, and the prose of Addison and Gibbon. I think also that I derived much benefit from my early training in the editorial department of *The Morning Chronicle*, during which it was my duty to revise and abridge the inordinate verbosity of the penny-a-liners, who were paid for their contributions according to their length, and strove in consequence to use more words than were necessary to narrate their facts or to explain their meaning.". *Charles Mackay.*

E. A. Freeman.

Some one has said that simplicity, naturalness and honesty are the lasting tests of art. Judged by this canon Professor Freeman's work is a work of art. In historical composition he wields the pen of a master. His writing is always strong, clear, and marked by a delightful sincerity and candour. It may be earnestly commended to all lovers of manly, straightforward English. I have the privilege of quoting some paragraphs from a long letter. "I have always held," says EDWARD A. FREEMAN, "that there are two main objects in writing, separate in idea, but which really come nearly to the same thing: to say what you have to say in the clearest words, and to keep up the purity of your native tongue. I always find when I have to revise anything written some time back that I can get rid of an outlandish word or two, and I do it. In quite early writings of mine I daresay you would find phrases that I should now eschew altogether, and cry out against in anybody else; the thing takes a good deal of pains. The principle is to say what you mean and mean what you say. To that end use straightforward English

words, about the meaning of which neither yourself nor your readers can have any doubt. The 'grand style,' the 'brilliant style,' the 'high polite style,' with its words which do not at once convey their own meaning to everybody, is the refuge of those who either have no very clear idea of their own meaning, or else have their reasons for not wishing their meaning to be clear to others. Much political talk on all sides of all questions comes under this last head. I have always tried, in political writing as well as any other, so to write that, whether people like what I think or not, they shall, at least, know what I do think. *E. A. Freeman.*

"I am charged with being 'diffuse.' That is because I have written the story of the Norman Conquest really in full. I am told that I am 'allusive,' because in my published Oxford lectures, addressed to people who are supposed to know something, I give them the pleasure—to me it is a very refined pleasure—of being reminded of this and that. I am told I should 'explain,' 'add notes,' &c. Yes, in their places! I can write milk for babes, too, when it is necessary. The people

E. A. Freeman.

who talk in this way had better stick to the 'Primer of European History,' it may just suit their understanding. I have also written the 'Short History of the Norman Conquest,' for those who may weary of the long one.

"I have learned more in the matter of style from Lord Macaulay than from any other writer, living or dead. I have not imitated him, but I have learned from him. Nobody ever had to read a sentence of his twice over to know what he meant; that, I guess, is the reason why every conceited young babbler thinks it fine to have a fling at him. I learned from him to make a sentence of reasonable length, and not to go rambling up and down through a wilderness of relatives. I learned never to be afraid of using the same word over and over again; not to cumber myself with pronouns and circumlocution, but to say what I meant in good English, with no scrap of other tongues, no cant phrases of the day, no joke thrust into every line, whether there is place for a joke or not. Tell your young men if they want real, model English, yet without archaism or affectation, they will find it in

Macaulay, prose and verse. Perhaps you will remember a very fine passage—it must be in the second volume—which ends, 'the Queen was with child.' Contrast that with some namby-pamby, dainty rubbish of ——, about 'Queen Mary being *enceinte*.' The one now seemingly left who can write English is Goldwin Smith; and the people who make all their silly lists of 'hundred books' and what not, never put him in. 'Spin your yarn in plain English,' is what Chucks says in 'Peter Simple'—perhaps some of the new-school writers may say something different: that's the root of the matter. One word more. Some people seem to think that foreign words, Latin, or otherwise, scraps of foreign tongues and the like, are signs of learning. Tell your young men it is just the other way. He who is really master of foreign tongues will no more corrupt his English with scraps of Greek, Latin, French, or any other tongue, than he will corrupt his Greek, Latin, or French with scraps of English. If a man drags in a Latin phrase—I say, drags in, for an apposite quotation from any tongue is always possible—I set it down that that is all the Latin he has."

E. A. Freeman.

Karl Blind.

KARL BLIND, the Anglo-German author, says: "There is to my knowledge no royal road to the art of composition. Every one must strike out a path for himself if he would acquire a forcible and interesting style. The style, it has been well said, with a degree of truth, is the writer's own individuality—'*Le style c'est l'homme.*' To cultivate clearness of thought and to develop strength of character will certainly be the first steps towards an impressive and attractive mode of utterance. There have been deep thinkers, no doubt, and men of marked individuality who have painfully struggled with the written or spoken word; but that is no reason why persons of far lesser capacity should inflict upon their readers or hearers the martyrdom produced by a dark, a feeble, and a tedious expression. 'All kinds of writing,' a master of style has said, 'are permissible, except the tiresome.'"

Sir J. F. Stephen.

Sir J. FITZJAMES STEPHEN writes: "The commonest source of obscurity is the misuse of the pronouns." A translation of Hegel contains this sentence: 'The notion is *that* in the *others that* is equal to *itself.*' Four pronouns

expressed, and a fifth (the one to answer to *the others*) implied in the definition of one substantive, and no noun for any of the four. A second source of obscurity is ambiguous arrangement—'They rushed out like a swarm of bees with axes in their hands,' for 'With axes in their hands they rushed forth like a swarm of bees.' I will add one other little remark — see you get your *onlys* right. 'Howe'er it be, it seems to me 'tis only noble to be good.' Lord Tennyson, no doubt, meant goodness is the only true nobility. What he says is, It is only noble to be good, *i.e.*, It is not a duty, but only matter of nobleness to be good, which he certainly did not mean." *Sir J. F. Stephen.*

As pointed out by Justice Stephen, ambiguous arrangement is a frequent source of obscurity in common speech. We sometimes read of "terra cotta ladies' gloves," of "woollen children's mits," of the "snake that was killed by a boy twelve feet long." A member of the Savage Club, so runs the story, was one day standing on the steps of the club-house. A messenger stopped and inquired: "Does a gentleman belong to your club with one eye named

Walker?" "I don't know," was the answer; "what was the name of his other eye?" A considerable difference in the sense of a sentence may result from misplacing a single word.

Sir R. and Lady Burton.

The names of SIR RICHARD and LADY BURTON are here united because the following contribution is their joint work. Another reason for coupling them may be found in the fact of their loving comradeship in the literary calling. "We divide the work," says Captain Burton. "I take all the hard and scientific part and make her do all the rest." Lady Burton has won for herself an enviable place in the world of letters, while the number, the variety, and the quality of the Captain's works are truly remarkable. Readers of the interesting letter here given will learn what it has cost the intrepid traveller, who made the memorable pilgrimage to Meccah and Medinah, to raise himself to a level with literary men of the foremost rank. Lady Burton writes to regret that so little can be said upon the subject. "My husband dictates as follows: 'His early

youth was passed on the Continent, where, in addition to the usual studies of Latin and Greek, he learnt, instinctively as it were, French and Italian, with their several dialects, as thoroughly as he did English. In his native tongue he was ever fond of the older writers, and gave himself with great ardour to the systematic study of Addison. He knew Shakespeare almost by heart, and learnt to admire the thorough propriety of words which distinguished him. He worked hard at the perfect prose of the English translation of the Bible, and to this he added Euclid by way of shortening his style and attaining clearness of thought. When travelling in Central Africa he always carried with him the three bound up together in a single volume, with three clasps like a breviary, and used it to cheer his many dull and disagreeable hours, not spent in actual exploration. When picturing scenery it was his habit to draw from nature, as if painting a landscape. When describing character, he studied the man as completely as he could, and meditated carefully over his mental picture before he ventured to put it upon paper. He is thoroughly convinced that

Sir R. and Lady Burton.

Sir R. and Lady Burton.

to express clearly, a man must think clearly, and must thoroughly understand what he means to express; and he would often pass the earlier hours of the night in reflecting upon the task of the coming morning. He felt that what is called unconscious cerebration was a great aid to his work. Having fixed in his mind exactly what he intended to say, he preserved himself from incoherent and unconnected writing. In India he passed stiff examinations in six languages, not to speak of Arabic and Pushtoo, the language of the Afghans. These studies again benefited his English style. Being forced to think of the foreign sentences before they were spoken, he applied the same process to English, and in that way gained no little clearness and point. In his many versions of Eastern authors, for instance, "The Thousand Nights and a Night," in sixteen volumes, he attempted to carry out his ideal estimate of a translator. According to him, the grand translator, Chaucer, was so-called by his contemporaries because he cast in thorough English mould the thoughts and language of Petrarch and of Boccaccio. Moreover, as no language is complete, and each

has some points in which it can be improved, he was ambitious of transferring from foreign tongues the idioms and turns of phrase which he thought might be naturalised and treated as welcome guests in English. Of course the process was viewed with different eyes by different people, some with friendly regard, whilst others characterised such efforts as "diverting lunacies of style."' Here my husband ceases to dictate, and I think I have given you as long an answer as you require. There is no doubt he is a master of English, and handles and plays with it skilfully; but to carry out his programme one must begin from childhood, and I doubt if it will serve what you want, whereas I think three very simple rules of my own might. One is, never to be ashamed to ask the meaning of anything, be it ever so simple, if one *ought* to know it. The second is, to read slowly, considering the words, and looking for the meaning of each different word in all its bearings. The third is, whether in speaking or in writing, to imagine you are relating a story to your friend by your own fireside, which gives a great charm to style, provided you avoid the

Sir R. and Lady Burton.

Sir R. and Lady Burton.

jerky, or flippant, or question and answer style, adhering to flowing, earnest, natural, easy narrative, as you would in such case, quite devoid of shyness and restlessness."

I have inserted the above remarkable record here in order to illustrate the fact that obscurity is avoided and clearness gained only as a result of the most patient toil and constant care.

Emile de Laveleye.

EMILE DE LAVELEYE, the eminent Belgian economist and author, says: "The first quality of style is, according to my opinion, that of saying clearly what one wishes to convince one's readers of; for language serves mainly to express one's thought. The second quality consists in the employment of energetic and highly-coloured word-pictures, which strike the imagination, awake the attention, and stamp the thought on the memory. In my opinion the most perfect example of the union of these two qualities, in French, is seen in the thoughts of Pascal. How shall a young man succeed in the formation of style? By reading good authors; above all, by reading them pen in hand, so as to take account of

their processes. A good professor can, in this direction, render great service to his pupil. No literature is richer in good models than your own. The Germans lack clearness and action. The Italians are diffuse. France has admirable writers, particularly those of the seventeenth century." *Emile de Laveleye.*

ALFRED EDERSHEIM, late Professor at Oxford, an eminent Hebrew scholar, wrote, just previous to his death: "I should say the first thing to be sought for is, that a writer shall have a clear and accurate conception of what he is about to communicate. Want of clearness in expression is mostly due to want of accuracy and a knowledge of details. You have a general knowledge, and can communicate it confusedly, because from your ignorance of details you dare not venture to use precise language. For myself I always try mentally to see the thing or the place which I intend to describe. Another mistake is, that writers and speakers take too much for granted on the part of those whom they are addressing. Do not take anything for granted, but write or speak as if you had to communicate the most *A Edersheim.*

A Edersheim. elementary details. It is an old adage that you should 'avoid fine writing.' Fine writing is artificial, unreal, got-up sentiment or figure. Be natural, truthful, and if such figures suggest themselves alter them, though with due self-restraint. Spare no trouble. What is worth doing is worth doing at your best. A single fact will reward a week's work. I never hesitate tearing up three or four attempts at the beginning of a MS. My last rule is, perseverance. I believe that determination and quiet persistence of work will ultimately succeed; that is, of course, when conjoined with proper application and sufficient knowledge."

Duke of Argyll. The DUKE OF ARGYLL does not believe in any rules or directions doing much in forming a man's style. "I have always held," he says, "that clear thinking will find its own expression in clear writing. As to mere technical rules, there are very few that occur to me, except such as these—1st, to aim at short sentences, without involution or parenthetical matter. 2nd, to follow a logical order in the construction of sentences, and in the sequence of them.

3rd, to avoid absolutely such phrases as 'the former' and 'the latter,' always preferring repetition to the use of such tiresome references. The last rule, and in some measure the others, I learnt from Macaulay, and have found it of immense use. There is some mannerism in his style, but it is always clear as crystal, and his rule of repetition contributed much to this. I began to write as quite a boy, but I did not do so with any conscious desire to form a style. I *wrote* because I *thought*, and thought keenly, on subjects of large interest; and also, perhaps, because I am naturally both reflective and argumentative." *Duke of Argyll.*

AMELIA B. EDWARDS is an author who has many claims upon our regard. She has achieved a notable reputation as Egyptologist and antiquarian; she has written some of our most readable books of modern travel; she is also a clever novelist, the writer of several romances of a high order of merit. "For my own part," she says, "I began authorship before I could write, and my first published production was a little poem at the age of seven! I have certainly always tried to be clear, and *Miss Amelia B. Edwards.*

Miss Amelia B. Edwards.

to avoid circumlocution. In the formation of my style, such as it is, I have aimed chiefly at these two ends, and it has always been my practice to read and re-read my MSS. with a view to striking out every unnecessary word till I could no longer find anything to prune. Of course I do not mean words unnecessary only to the sense. Words unnecessary to the mere sense are often necessary to the grace or music of a sentence, and are therefore necessary in another way. Looking back to the time when I first took up literature seriously —say, from 1850 to 1855—I think I was most influenced by the style of Macaulay, Hazlitt, Lamb, Shelley, in his prose writings, and De Quincey. But I do not know that these permanently affected my own method. . . . I have not much faith in 'gifts,' but I believe in a fine sense of music and a good ear. I happened to have a *thorough* musical education, and I believe I have a good ear; and to me it seems that my literary work owes a great deal, as regards form, to counterpoint and phrasing."

Miss Sarah Tytler.

SARAH TYTLER is the *nom de guerre* of

Henrietta Kidder. This author's stories are written in a quaint style, subdued and not unpleasing; and her characters are always truthfully and philosophically developed. "I am afraid," she says, "my own style of writing is not good. I am aware that it is involved, though I have tried hard to correct the fault; and I have been told of other defects. Any success I have had as an author has been, I suspect, in spite of my style. I have generally had, or thought I had, a story to tell, and I have been in earnest in telling it. I was brought up in the country, and educated at home, with considerable, though by no means unlimited, access to books. I was very fond of reading, and read the Waverley Novels over and over again; and though these did not do what they might have done for my style, I have no doubt they enlarged my mind. At a later date my time was so much occupied that though reading and a certain amount of study came into the occupation, as it were, I had not the leisure to do much to form or improve my style. My own opinion is that the great means to promote style is to read good standard books, avoiding those which

Miss Sarah Tytler.

Miss Sarah Tytler.

are low-toned, or, what is perhaps worse, flashy. I believe that style is in a manner infectious, and that by habitually keeping good company in books we are as sure to catch the tone of their authors as we catch the tone of the best—that is, the most spiritually noble, agreeable, and intelligent—society."

Mrs. L. T. Meade.

L. T. MEADE is the editor of *Atalanta*, and the author of a number of sensible and useful stories, mostly suitable for young people. "In my own case," writes Mrs. Meade, "I have not followed the approved methods, but always allow my stories to grow under my hands, and my principal characters to guide me rather than I them. I have often been asked by publishers to make a plot for a story, but I find this plan of writing almost impossible. If I may venture to give a hint to young writers, it would be to beg of them in writing fiction to remove every character from their pages which does not appear to them to live. There comes a moment, at least I find it so, in the writing of stories, when all the characters worth anything become as real and alive to the author

as if they were human beings. The characters that do not so live are only puppets, and will never awaken interest in the reader. I have written now steadily for twelve years. At first I made frequent copies of my MSS., but now never do so. I dictate all my stories, and can say with truth that I have very little idea beforehand of what I am going to say. I have not consciously followed any style; but I have always loved stories, and could make them up as far back as I can remember. Let me recommend an article by Walter Besant, 'On the Writing of Novels,' in the December (1887) number of *Atalanta*. Two more articles by him on the same subject appear in the April and May (1888) numbers of the magazine. Perhaps I may add from myself, that I love writing about children best, and have always studied them from the life." Mrs. Meade's stories are very clearly composed, without a touch of ambiguity. Her characters are genuine flesh and blood. *Mrs. L. T. Meade.*

FRANCES CASHEL HOEY, a novelist of considerable power, writes to say: "I have always had a taste for studies with direct *Mrs. F. C. Hoey.*

Mrs. F. C. Hoey.

and indirect bearing upon language, and I think, although I never received any formal instruction, I hit upon a good method of self-teaching when I was a very young woman—I married at sixteen—living in a remote place, having access to but few books and not to any kind of assistance in learning. I perceived at a very early stage of my studies that grammar is a common-sense system, applicable to spoken and written tongues, with immutable first principles and various methods of adaptation. The significance and place of the so-called parts of speech do not vary, nor does their relation to each other. Then I studied from that point of view the *Analyse Logique* and *Analyse Grammaticale* of Noël et Chapsal, and found it an excellent help to use the ideas and methods contained in those works. I found they were as valuable for English as for French composition. I read in English such works of the best authors as I could procure, and I carefully analysed, so to speak dissected, their language, studying the relation and proportion of words, and making a very careful study of synonyms, with due observation of the more or less

accurate representation of each by the others. Then, by the aid of a Latin grammar and dictionary, I formed for myself a sort of table of derivations, and got a general idea in using words of harmonising them; for instance, in the employment of adjectives, to use adjectives of Latin derivation to qualify nouns of like origin. I have been able to acquire, without ever receiving the smallest help, a fair knowledge of the Italian and Spanish languages, and have made several translations from the former, both of prose and poetical works. I have always found the study of derivations and the habit of analysis of the greatest use to me, as enabling me to follow the reasonable course of construction, and to discern with comparative ease the similarities and the differences between languages. The only English grammar I ever used was Lindley Murray's, and that I discarded when I had mastered the formulæ, but I was indebted to the venerable old master for a keen perception of the niceties of tense and the importance of correct employment of prepositions; also for a tolerably accurate use of the various adverbs of time, place, &c." *Mrs. F. C. Hoey.*

W. C Russell.

W. CLARK RUSSELL, the author of a number of enthralling stories of life and adventure on the ocean, writes with a studious accuracy, a graceful and striking individuality, most pleasing to the reader. His books are not only correct in presentation, but thoroughly sound in sentiment, instructive, entertaining, and in every way wholesome. "Although I was at Winchester," says Mr. Russell, "and at two or three schools in France—one of them a famous seminary, where, amongst my companions were three sons of the late Charles Dickens—I went to sea so young, at the age of thirteen and a-half, that I believe before I had been six months on the ocean all the knowledge I had acquired under the shadow of the birch was washed out of me. When I quitted the sea I read much, and in many directions, but chiefly old authors. I was and still am a great lover of florid literature. Jeremy Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne, the Nonconformist Howe, old Anatomy Burton, the dramatists, particularly Beaumont and Fletcher, Marlowe, Chapman, were my passion, as they still are my delight. My taste for poetry led me to range through the

dull periods even of Johnson's bards; but of all poets I think I owe most to Wordsworth. In truth, I have read a very great deal, but it would be impossible for me to determine the extent of my obligation to any particular author. My experience is that I can best express what I see most clearly, hence, as my acquaintance with the sea-life is considerable, few illustrations of it can occur but that I can grasp them in their entirety; and I find that words seldom fail me when the image present to my imagination is charged with living colour and defined in its true proportions. Style, in my humble judgment, is largely dependent upon observation. A ploughman would tell you what he knows more graphically than one ignorant of the subject, yet a master of English, would be able to express it. The deficiencies are a mere question of grammar, which any usher without a particle of imagination would be able to rectify. My advice to a young beginner would be first take the trouble to thoroughly understand what you propose to convey and the words will follow. I sometimes wish, indeed, that there was less style and more understanding.

W. C. Russell.

W. C. Russell. Dr. Johnson's fine criticism of Dr. Robertson's style, 'that he rolls up every little piece of gold in a great quantity of wool,' is much too applicable to this age to be relishable. A good style, in my opinion, follows good sense. To be intelligible is the first consideration, and that can only attend the language of a man who knows what he is about."

Edmund Yates. EDMUND YATES, journalist and novelist, who writes with a straightforward and generous-hearted style, simple and unadorned, says: "I have not the slightest idea how I acquired such style in writing as I may possess. I always aimed at simplicity, and endeavoured to make myself 'understood of the people,' and I have always resolutely restricted myself from writing 'with a purpose,' or endeavouring to convey the powder of instruction in the jam of amusement. I may congratulate myself, too, on having a very keen ear for dissonance; and this has been of the more service to me, as I honestly confess to recollecting very few rules of grammar."

O. Crawfurd. OSWALD CRAWFURD, a novelist who always

writes with force and correctness of style, says : *O. Crawfurd.*
" Of all the arts none seems to me greater, and even to state the thing at its lowest, more useful, than the art of clothing thought in appropriate words. The art of course includes more and higher work than that, for it includes, too, that of so shaping and co-ordinating ideas as that when they obtain expression they shall be to the utmost prevalent with reader or listener. Perhaps you will say this is more than style; it is eloquence. I think it is; but I am inclined to believe that if you restrain style to its commoner definition, and study to form a good one, you run a risk of acquiring an artificial and mannered style. It is so with every other art, with painting for instance. Sometimes when I hear a critic saying before a picture: 'How exquisitely that grass is rendered!' or, 'What wonderful flesh tones!' I am tempted to say: 'Yes, but has the painter succeeded in expressing his idea? Could he have expressed the emotion of his soul more feelingly or better?' So with a poem, a novel, the question should be, 'Has the poet or author so co-ordinated his thought, his idea, or his suggestions, and so presented them, as

O. Crawford.

to produce their utmost effect?' If so, his style is perfect; but if, at first reading, I am taken up with admiring his phrases, I begin to think that he has failed in the highest art of all. Art is at its best when the writer can make us forget that there is such a thing as style at all, so greatly does he move us. Take Shakespeare for instance. When one first reads such a passage as

> What may this mean,
> That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel
> Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,
> Making night hideous?

and the whole speech, one is stirred with a passion of awe in sympathy, such as Hamlet himself must have felt. It is only when one begins calmly to dissect the words, the ideas, the music of each exquisite phrase that one suddenly confesses how great a mastery of style is here.

"But one must begin at the bottom of the ladder. Now I am pretty well assured that the first step on this same ladder of style is, if one may so call it, the rung of lucidity. The French have a proverb, 'What is obscure is bad French.' I wish we had a corresponding

one. But whether we possess the maxim or not, no good English writer, from Swift to De Quincey, has written English hard to be understood. Then, still mounting the ladder, one might, to parody Mr. Ruskin, place the rung of brevity next, and after that the rung of rhythm, and the rungs of beauty, of force, of grace, and of wit, till presently we should reach a height on the ladder where only genius can tread, and where humbler folk would do wisely not to climb. If I had to live my life—the apprentice stage of my literary life—over again, I should do a great many more things to form my style, and especially to avoid bad literary habits, than I did. The first thing, of course, is to set a right model before oneself. That is, it seems to me, a very great difficulty. How is an unformed taste to recognise the good from the vicious in style? For a long time Addison was the recognised model. We don't think so now. Later every one imitated Dr. Johnson. Now every schoolboy believes Dr. Johnson's English is all wrong. I know a very brilliant man of letters, who has ruined his style and immensely lessened his influence, because in his youth he was an enthusiastic

O. Crawfurd.

O. Crawfurd.

admirer of Carlyle's writings, and formed his style on his. It is a difficulty to choose aright, and I don't quite see how to get out of it. I am sure in my own mind that Dryden, Defoe, Swift, Bacon, Berkeley, Jeremy Taylor, Barrow, and Goldsmith, are all, in their different ways, admirable models, but I would not expect any one to take my authority for it. It is an opinion, not a dogma. However, if I had to begin again I would try to find out the really good writers; I would study their methods, I would increase my vocabulary from their stores, but I would never strive after any direct imitation. All this, I suppose, we all do more or less, or have done, consciously or unconsciously; but I would make it a very serious study. I would keep notes of happy phrases, neat turns of speech, appropriate words. Of one thing I am convinced from my own experience, that the power of every man, in whatever rank or position of life he may find himself, is made greater, his usefulness to himself and others increased, and he himself is by this difference raised in the scale of humanity, if he has learnt to express himself in written words easily, clearly, and well."

EDWARD EGGLESTON, an American author, is widely known this side the Atlantic through his skilful and telling stories. He says: "Facts regarding one's mental biography are very elusive. The environment of my boyhood on the banks of the Ohio, a thousand miles inland, was so totally different from anything known to English youth, that I should have difficulty to make myself understood were I to go into particulars. But this I may say, I had the good fortune to be born in a family in which literary acquirement was esteemed above everything else after religion. I was taught by my father, who died when I was yet but a little lad, to deny myself the pleasure of the confectioner's in order to spend my pocket pennies for books. He little thought what an extravagance this same buying of books would come to be. *E. Eggleston.*

"I do not remember when the dream of being an author began to take hold of my imagination. From ten years old I practised writing diligently. I read Blair's Rhetoric, and Kamer on Criticism, but the good I got from these books was not in their rules, but in the habit of analysing my own sentences, and of

E. Eggleston.

criticising my own style. It is generally forgotten by students of style, that clear thinking is back of all clear expression. To disentangle a subject and go straight at the kernel of the matter is the first lesson. The early habit of telling stories and expounding subjects to children did me great service by making me impatient of any obscurity. To be able to make oneself understood by children and plain people is a long step in the direction of habitual lucidity. Felicitous expression, in so far as I am able to attain it at all, is the result of painstaking. As I grow older I work more and more patiently upon the details of expression, and interline my manuscript, to the sad discomfiture of printers. I have lost my early fluency in this strife after better expression, this endeavour to avoid the hackneyed, and to find truer and more varied arrangement of thought and language; for prose has its rhythm as well as poetry. I sometimes think good prose is harder of achievement than good poetry. After all, my ideal stands away ahead and mocks at my achievement. I come so far short of what I seek that it seems presumptuous

for me to make suggestions upon the subject." *E. Eggleston.*

BRANDER MATTHEWS, as essayist and novelist, writes in a cheerful, witty, and agreeable style. He is a constant contributor to the leading American magazines. He says: "While at college, and when a law student, I used to write; and I remember that I tried always to know what I had to say, and then to say it directly and in straightforward fashion. The authors who influenced me the most were Emerson, Lowell, and Matthew Arnold, all of whom abhorred the obscure and the ornate. I have always read almost as many books in French as in English; and the general level of French prose is higher than that of English. To a beginner, the advice I should give would be to think straight and write simply. To be clear is the first duty of a writer: to charm and to please are graces to be acquired later." *B. Matthews.*

ROSE TERRY COOKE is a talented American author of graceful verse and of simple and pathetic stories. Her writing is characterised *Rose T. Cooke.*

Rose T. Cooke.

by purity of tone, quaintness of humour, and keen observation of life. "I was not educated," she says, "with any idea of becoming a literary person; my mother, who exclusively taught me, had no such thought. She did, however, train me early to express my thoughts in words. I began between the ages of six and seven to write a daily journal; and every day I was obliged to learn by heart, both to spell and define, half a page from Walker's Dictionary, and was given two words from that task to use in a sentence to prove I understood them. I was taught to read early. At three years old I could read anything; and I remember at five being set up on the counter of a book-shop to astonish the bookseller by reading to him a page of black-letter, which my father had taught me to read. I do not recommend this too early training in any case; I think it is always a mistake. Of course, in those days the reading of children, as far as children's books were concerned, was very limited. We had Miss Edgeworth's books and Mrs. Sherwood's; the translated Berguin's 'Children's Friend,' and the tales of Madame de Genlis; but I soon finished those, and foraged for myself in my

grandfather's library. I read Shakespeare before I was ten years old, and what were then called 'the English Classics': the *Rambler*, *Spectator*, *Tatler*, *Idler*, *World*, and so on, where I found plenty of lucid, racy, if old-fashioned English. I read Pope's poetry, too, with parts of Dryden; and later on, Scott and Campbell. Byron I have never read, except a few of his lyrics. Southey, Wordsworth, Keats, were all familiar to me early in life. My later reading has been various, for I read very fast, and a great deal. If I have ever had any definite idea of forming a style, it has been merely a resolution to say what I had to say as simply, clearly, and forcibly as in me lay. I have never liked the obscurity of some modern writers, whose splendid genius seems to me to be cruelly shrouded in idle words. It has always appeared to me a real wrong to a thought or an idea to hide it in a mist of language. Further, I must add that I have constantly had before me the strong hope and intention to do some work for God in my small measure; this has been a strength to me always." *Rose T. Cooke.*

To bring this chapter to a close, I may quote, with advantage to the reader, from a communication written by an Irish poet of considerable power, the author of "Stories of Wicklow," &c. His letter can hardly be termed a protest against obscurity, but it is a valuable affirmation of principles which, if observed, will enable a writer to avoid that fatal defect.

G. F. Armstrong.

GEORGE FRANCIS ARMSTRONG writes: "My own feeling, generally, is, that my vocabulary is not half large enough, and that I am often baffled in the attempt to express with absolute distinctness delicate shades of thought and emotion which I wish to clothe in words. I have been, however, so often told by eminent intellectual men that my writings do show a command of the resources of expression that I suppose my mind must be better equipped and more agile than I am aware, though not as flexible or richly provided as I could desire. If this is so, I think any special aptitude I possess is hereditary. My brother had a natural gift of expression, the most unusual and striking; and I perceive a remarkable

development of the same faculty in my own children; and it seems to be derived less from my father's family than from my mother's—the family of Savage, which has given to the world Richard Savage, Walter Savage Landor, and from which, strangely enough, Lord Tennyson also traces his descent. If I have attained to any excellence in my art, I attribute this—1st, to something of an inherited faculty; 2nd, to constant practice from a very early age (I began to write poetry at the age of eleven); 3rd, to the companionship, up to my twentieth year, of my gifted brother, whose natural endowments I have never seen equalled throughout all my later experience of life; 4th, to familiarity from my boyhood with the greatest authors of ancient and modern times; 5th, to a high ideal which such familiarity has tended to foster; 6th, to an intolerance and hatred of bad workmanship; 7th, to an anxiety to give the reader as little trouble as possible to understand what I have wished to say." *G. F. Armstrong.*

Referring to the cultivation of a good prose style, Mr. Armstrong says: "If I were endeavouring to teach the art of prose

G. F. Armstrong.

composition, I should say—1st, the student should get hold of facts and digest them well; 2nd, that he should arrange them in logical order in his mind before attempting to commit them to writing; 3rd, that he should aim at a clear and chaste, rather than at an ornate style of expression, avoiding eccentricities and affectations; 4th, that he should write to make his meaning evident to his readers, rather than simply to get what he has to say written, and for this purpose he ought to be able to project himself into the minds of his readers and look at his composition as an outsider; 5th, that he should saturate himself with the works of the best prose writers, not only of his own country, but, if possible, also of Greece, Rome, Italy, France, and Germany; 6th, that he should aim at uniting the best elements of the styles of various standard authors, and not copy that of any one author in particular; 7th, that he should read inferior and affected authors from time to time, so that he may learn what to avoid; 8th, that he should be a very severe and exacting critic of all he does, and never give up his work until he has

brought it to the highest perfection possible to him at the time. Above all things, I believe a writer's ideal will be elevated by the study of all the fine arts—poetry, painting, music, sculpture, and even architecture—and of the art of Greece more than that of any other country."

G. F. Armstrong.

TRUTHFULNESS TO ONE'S SELF.

TRUTHFULNESS TO ONE'S SELF.

"EVERY man will be most effective when he is truest to his own individuality of thought and expression." This sentence from a short note by Dr. Joseph Parker gives utterance to the fact I am anxious my last selection of contributions shall, more or less directly, illustrate and confirm. If they show my reader that power accompanies work only when it comes out of the worker's being; that life reaches life as nothing else can; that soul touches soul when eloquence and scholarship fail in their self-appointed mission, they will amply have justified their reproduction in these pages.

Truthfulness means the correspondence between the outward sign and the inward reality. Whenever the fact is knowingly distorted in the statement; when the show is not verified by the substance; when fulfilment is wilfully made to come short of promise, there is insincerity in one shape or

another. With an author, any approach to such a fault must vitiate all his work. If his words do not express his thoughts, or if his thoughts do not express his convictions, his composition may be perfect in construction, but it will lack reality, and lacking reality it will be worthless. Nothing can offend a self-respecting reader more seriously than tawdry imitation, or the artificial instead of the real.

Chaucer wrote his last earthly song when lying on his death-bed, and amid great anguish of body, and the burden of it was:

> Reul wel thiself that other folks canst rede,
> And truthe shall delyvere.

No better counsel can any author follow. Be true to your own heart, to your own nature; put your own personality into your work. That is the only hope of superiority. Personalities are as various as people are numerous. No two are ever alike. Of necessity it must follow that for a man to be effective, he must be genuine, sincere, absolutely true to himself. He must think for himself, speak in his own way, use his own language, and make all his work the

honest expression of his inner self. Then his style will be his own. He will not write in the fashion of Carlyle, or of Tennyson, or of Browning. He will be his own true self. The sentiment every author should cherish is well put in a forceful verse by the Irish lyric poet, the late William Allingham:

> Not like Homer would I write,
> Not like Dante if I might,
> Not like Shakespeare at his best,
> Not like Goethe or the rest;
> Like myself, however small,
> Like myself, or not at all.

William Allingham.

So in his letter upon this subject Mr. ALLINGHAM said: "As to style, if I have one, I can no more account for it than for the shape of my nose. I was always fond of reading, and enjoyed very various styles; when I tried to write, my aim was to speak as directly and naturally as possible of what I saw and felt. I suppose one ought to imbibe art from familiarity with good examples, then, in writing, forget all examples and try to express something that strives for expression. Style is but a medium, and in itself of no value or less; I would not encourage any one to

William Allingham. cultivate it, unless with the aim of clearness and simplicity."

But is style in itself of no value? Does not a writer's merit largely lie in the *way* he utters his thought? That a man should be true to the truth within him is assuredly the all-important factor in his literary work; and yet it is also certain that truth expressed will be more alluring and impressive if robed in beauty than if meanly or carelessly attired. Elegance of form and attractiveness of arrangement are in themselves elements of power. Many a volume of noble truth owes its widespread and enduring influence to its grace and charm of style. Strip it of its subtleties of harmony and beauty, and you leave it unsightly and uninteresting as a splendid tree robbed of its foliage.

Walter Pater. Perhaps no prose writer of to-day has a more sensitive imagination or a more chaste and musical style than WALTER PATER. Any statement upon our subject by an author of such scholarly attainment, as well as of such

impressive beauty of expression, will be doubly welcome. "I wish I could send you anything helpful," says Mr. Pater, "towards the matter on which you have asked my opinion. It would take me a long time to formulate the rules, conscious or unconscious, which I have followed in my humble way. I think they would, one and all, be reducible to *Truthfulness* —truthfulness, I mean, to one's own inward view or impression. It seems to me that all the excellencies of composition, clearness, subtlety, beauty, freedom, severity, and any others there may be, depend upon the exact propriety with which language follows or shapes itself to the consciousness within. True and good elaboration of style would, in this way, come to be the elaboration, the articulation to oneself of one's own meaning, one's real condition of mind. I suppose this is the true significance of that often quoted saying, that style is the man. Of course models count for much. As beginners, at least, we are all learners. I think Tennyson and Browning, in quite opposite ways, have influenced me more than prose writers. And I have come to think that, on the whole, Newman is our

Walter Pater.

Walter Pater. greatest master of prose, partly on account of the variety of his excellence."

P. G. Hamerton. PHILIP GILBERT HAMERTON has, perhaps, done more to familiarise the reading public with the principles and methods of art than any other writer. His work stands amongst the very finest examples of simple, direct, and thoroughly-trained composition to be found in contemporary literature. "For some years," he says, "I was a private pupil of Dr. Butler, of Burnley, who thought it very probable that I should one day be an author, and who most kindly took great pains with me. I wrote hundreds of essays for him, which he very carefully corrected, pointing out to me all the faults—and they were many—that he could discover. He had a very cool, sound judgment as a critic, and though, on the whole, his way of dealing with my work was encouraging, he chastised it very freely. I have had other masters for foreign languages; but for English, after elementary instruction, Dr. Butler was my only master.

"My present system of writing is, first, to make a very free and rapid rough draft, not

applying myself with any conscious care to the expression, but writing for the facts and ideas only. This done, I see my way more clearly, lengthen some passages and abridge others, often efface whole pages, and then, when the work has got into something like shape, I criticise and amend the expressions. I believe this is unquestionably the best way of composing. I think it is a mistake to try to write too well in the first instance, because the matter of earliest importance is to get the materials down on paper somehow, and the more rapid the writing the better the chances of getting unity into the work, especially if it be long. But, after that, I should say, spare no pains—spare neither pains nor paper—in the labour of correction, which answers in literature to the second and third paintings on a picture. I should say, too, that it is of importance for a writer to keep his eye over the whole of his composition as much as possible, and so keep it well together, not concentrating his attention too much on details. I hardly ever correct anything on the printed proofs, except mere typographic errors.

P. G. Hamerton.

"I would not recommend any young man

P. G. Hamerton.

to try for style by imitation of some great master; neither would I recommend him to strive in a conscious manner to be original. He should seek to express himself clearly, without affectation of any kind, and then pay attention to the sound, to the music of the language, which is part of every good style, even when it seems quite artless. 'Good writing is as much a fine art as painting or musical composition."

A. Birrell.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL is widely known as the author of "Obiter Dicta," a series of clever essays pervaded by much elevation and refinement of spirit, in which the author occasionally focuses his thoughts in sentences of great charm. "The style is the man," he says, "and imitation of anybody's style is as much to be avoided as the cock of his hat, or his way of swinging his umbrella. What can be more odious than a style formed upon Carlyle, Ruskin, or Macaulay! My advice to any one who aspires to write well is—First, avoid ornament and write plainly and tersely; secondly, don't try and be funny—anything more dreadful than a forced gaiety or elabo-

rate liveliness it is hard to imagine; thirdly, never let a day pass without reading a really good bit of English—an essay by Addison or Arnold, a sermon by Newman or Spurgeon, one of Cobbett's Rural Rides, or a letter of Cowper's. Almost all modern novels are written in atrociously bad English. In conclusion I would add, be temperate and restrained, and take enormous pains. Nobody need know how many times you have copied a sentence before you have despatched it to the press. It is usually important to have something to say. I have nothing more to say, so will now give you an example of a really good piece of English: When you have nothing to say, say nothing." *A. Birrell.*

EDMUND GOSSE, a writer of both prose and verse rich and masterly in style, says: "In reply to your first question, although I cannot for a moment allow myself to accept the too gracious words you apply to the manner of what I write, it is true that all my life, from childhood, it has been my conscious aim to say what had to be said as exactly, shortly, and picturesquely, as possible. I think the *Edmund Gosse.*

Edmund Gosse. only advice that can be given to young people must take the form of counsel what *not* to say. Let a man speak with earnestness and promptitude, having something first to communicate, and let him eliminate from his speech all that is loose, needless, and ineffective, and there is style, the pure juice of his nature, in what he says. So that I should say, the first recipe is complete sincerity and directness; the second is familiarity from earliest youth with what is best in classic English verse and prose. The reading aloud of passages of special weight and splendour of style is doubtless of great practical benefit. With all this, my belief is that style is properly an inborn faculty, like the other imaginative arts, to be trained, chastened, and expanded by labour if it exists in the nature, but not to be implanted in a barren ground by all the masterpieces in all the literature of the world."

J. C. Carr. J. COMYNS CARR, the editor of *The English Illustrated Magazine*, says he half distrusts his own recollection of the influences that were most potent in early youth, and shrinks

from appearing to speak with authority to minds differently tempered to his own, and needing, it may be, another impulse and direction. But he adds: "I am of opinion there is need of some kind of exact training for the mind in order that a writer may acquire lucidity and coherence of thought. This exact training may be of several kinds, and will of course vary in degree according to the special temper of each individual. In my own case, I always feel that I owe much to the early study of mathematics, and to a later application to the science of law. The conditions of study are in both cases stringent and exacting, and must, I think, tend to the cultivation of logical thought and clear expression. These, in my judgment, are the essentials of a true style, but I do not say that such studies form a source of literary inspiration. On the contrary, I am disposed to believe that for this there is only one true source, and that is the love and study of poetry. I speak now of the cultivation of a prose style; in a poet born, the love and study of poetry will beget a new creation in the same kind; but even for the cultivation of a

J. C. Carr.

J. C. Carr. sound prose style I believe nothing to be more fruitful than the study of verse. Do not think that I underrate what good may come of the admiration and even imitation of the masterpieces of prose, and if I dwell more upon the virtues of poetry it is because in its matter it appeals more directly to us when we are young; and even more because in its nature and method it compels a closer and keener scrutiny of the value and meaning of words. This, if I may say so, is the burden of what I feel disposed to give by way of advice."

F. G. Heath. FRANCIS GEORGE HEATH, referring to his own books, says: "To my great astonishment they have been welcomed by the press generally with a warmth of praise quite out of proportion to their merits. I ascribe this particular result to the circumstance that, apart from anything in the nature of literary style, I have always written as I have felt, and my feelings have oftentimes been so strongly stirred by the indefinable charm of those subjects of nature which I have mostly selected for my themes, that elements of enthusiasm (which are said to be contagious)

have insensibly crept into my descriptions, and have infected my reviewers in such a manner as to warp their judgment. In one of my books, 'My Garden Wild,' I have ventured to ascribe, perhaps unwarrantably, my enthusiasm for the beauties of nature to the fact that I was born in one of the most exquisitely beautiful parts of England, and it is probable that one's feelings are influenced by early surroundings. You will say that possessing feelings and having the faculty of clearly expressing them are two very different things. Assuming the possession of the ability to write good English, I think it would follow that the cold or the eloquent rendering of one's feelings would be very much a matter of enthusiasm or enthusiastic temperament. *F. G. Heath.*

"I hold with a good many others that the true literary art is very much inborn. . . . I remember that when very young I had a strong inclination to write the autobiographies of animals. But if there is one thing more calculated than another to assist in the clear expression of ideas, assuming the pre-existence of the literary tendency, it is the study, I

F. G. Heath. think, of popular scientific books. I was always very fond of natural philosophy, and such studies, I am sure, aid very much in the acquisition of a clear, logical, and lucid style of writing. Cobbett, you remember, bluntly said that the man who did not write correctly could not think correctly. There is much truth in this. A clear writer is generally a clear *talker*. But I believe that the best method of writing with clearness and force is to lay well hold of the thing to be described, to see that you discern it clearly with the mind's eye, and then, in the most logical sequence and in the simplest language, to describe it. A writer must first be perfectly sure that he himself understands what he is writing about before attempting to communicate his ideas to others. Good scientific writing must be precise and clear, because nothing can be taken for granted. Hence my belief that the study of scientific works constitutes a useful training."

Mrs. E. Pfeiffer. EMILY PFEIFFER, a poet of wide repute, says: "Education in my young days was not within the reach of the gently born who were

also poor, therefore I had little or none of it. In those years of disabling ill-health in which my early maturity was passed I read and thought and felt—in a word, lived a life that was only quiet on the surface; and when at length my powers were released from the enfeebling physical conditions which had borne upon them as a galling chain, and I was permitted to speak for myself, I was too full of the thing I had to say to be consciously occupied with the manner of giving it forth. 'Gerard's Monument' was my first true utterance, the first that came from any inner depth. When it was written I had passed the imitative age, although I am conscious in that poem of a certain indebtedness to Coleridge; in no other of my writings have I moulded my thought, in ever so remote a degree, upon the form adopted by any other. In the formation of style, the sole advantage of which I am aware in my own case is, that I have never been forced to write when I had nothing to say. When I have composed, it was that I wished to reveal to other minds a thought which, for the moment, had become dear to me as a child of my own. I tried

Mrs. E. Pfeiffer.

Mrs. E. Pfeiffer.

to exhibit it in the clearest light, because I had faith in its worth. If I adorned it at all in my effort to commend it, it was not in cold blood, but in a sort of motherly pride. I rocked it, turned it about, and sung to it, because the thought was my tyrant and would have it so. Finally, I have put it from me with regret, and from discretion, fearing lest it should weary my few readers to whom it could never be all that it had been to me. With the exception of the endeavour for clearness—lucidity—which is the basis of all that is good in style, I fear there is nothing in what I have been able to tell you at all likely to be useful. One thing more: perhaps in style, the symmetry of the whole is more even than the perfection of the parts; and I found myself from the outset much helped in this by a somewhat deeper knowledge of the art of design in painting than I had of literature. When my thought had become concrete, taken upon itself a body of external circumstance, I looked at it, placed it upon the canvas of my mind, and judged it as if it had been a picture. The sense of harmony and pro-

portion in one art was thus transferred to the other." *Mrs. E. Pfeiffer.*

Other writers in other realms of literature claim consideration. That Hungarian patriot, full of the romantic and adventurous spirit of his people, ARMINIUS VAMBÉRY, the author of a story of his own life stranger and more stirring far than any fiction, has kindly contributed a few lines upon our subject which are sure to be read with grateful interest. "I would gladly comply," he says, "with your desire, referring to what may be called the appropriation of a clear and intelligible style, but this would require a long treatise upon the art of writing and composing, a task to which I could hardly respond. The fundamental law, '*Le style c'est l'homme*,' makes all theories and speculations illusory; and if there is anything by which our pen is rendered expressive it can only be found in the frequent and attentive reading of good books, and in the fervent desire to communicate our thoughts to the reader with the same fire and in the same spirit which agitates our own mind. I cannot invite the attention of a reader to a subject of *Arminius Vambéry.*

Arminius Vambéry. the truth of which I am not fully convinced; and I am at a loss to find the proper expression for ideas which do not animate me. Style is the channel from one heart to another; and the art, how we transmit, depends greatly upon the nature of the material which we intend to transmit. This is the case with me, but I could not vouch whether it is also the case with others."

J. A. Froude. JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE, the historian, is a writer whose style is almost startling in its brilliance. It is crisp, nervous, energetic, beautiful. Whatever comes from the pen of Mr. Froude—history, essay, novel—is composed with a vigour and power of fascination unexcelled by any living English author, with the single exception of the incomparable John Ruskin. "I have never thought about style at any time in my life," he says. "I have tried merely to express what I had to say with as much simplicity and as little affectation as I could command. When I have been tempted into exaggeration, I have checked myself with imagining what some one whose judgment I respected would say if I used such language in

speaking or writing to him; and this was usually sufficient. As a rule, when I go over what I have written, I find myself striking out superfluous epithets, reducing superlatives into positives, bringing subjunctive moods into indicative, and in most instances passing my pen through every passage which had seemed, while I was writing it, to be particularly fine. If you sincerely desire to write nothing but what you really know or think, and to say that as clearly and as briefly as you can, style will come as a matter of course. Ornament for ornament's sake is always to be avoided. There is a rhythm in prose as well as in verse, but you must trust your ear for that. This is very vague and inadequate, but it is all that I can give you." *J. A. Froude.*

F. W. NEWMAN says: "I am afraid my reply will disappoint you. Buffon is quoted as saying: 'The style is the man.' The form of the utterance is French; but I seem to hold the same belief in saying: Good composition depends on the total culture of the mind, and cannot be taught as a separate art. It demands habitual accuracy of thought, accuracy in the acceptance of words, accuracy in logic, and *F. W. Newman.*

F. W. Newman.

habitual consideration how others—the public—will look at an utterance, from what side they must be approached, in what way your arguments must be ranged, and in what order of words a clause has best emphasis. No one will write well who has to make a study of such matters when he sits down to write. All must previously have become an ingrained habit, perhaps without his being aware of it. Thus, indeed, many ladies are beautiful composers and powerful speakers. Love of truth, eagerness for the right, a mind that drives direct at the object and is not seeking to display itself, are moral factors of good composition.

"You ask concerning myself. I have no objection to name one habitual exercise which I believe to have been from my early youth beneficial to my English writing, though it never was resorted to with any such idea, and that is, my elaborate culture of that difficult accomplishment, the writing of Latin prose. Classical Latin writers eminently avoid abstract and metaphysical diction, by which, as I suppose, the mediæval schoolmen have corrupted Europe extensively. In writing

Latin one has carefully to study every ambiguity of the English words, and in recloth-ing thoughts largely to discard *abstract* forms and replace them by the concrete. Ambiguity of pronouns must also be guarded against, and everything redundant in the English thrown away. Such exercise conduces to habitual terseness, which is in general a virtue. Amplification, and even repetition, have their fit place; but mere verbosity and want of point are very common failings. My advice to a pupil would be:—Cultivate accuracy of words and things; amass sound knowledge; avoid all affectation; write for practical objects and on topics which most interest you, on which you seem to have something worth saying. To a prepared mind words will come of themselves." *F. W. Newman.*

EDWIN A. ABBOTT, till lately the head-master of the City of London School, the author of many thoughtful books dealing with vital questions of the day, says of himself: "Looking back on the means that helped me to write clearly, I think I must have learned a great deal from teaching. Perhaps I learned *Dr. Abbott.*

Dr. Abbott.

to classify and to avoid some errors and ambiguities and faults of taste by constantly being forced to note them. In one's earlier training, too, I think, one learns much from the practice of translating from Latin and Greek into English. Ancient thought, as well as the structure of ancient language, is so different from modern thought, that it is very difficult sometimes to express the meaning of the classical authors in English without ransacking one's English vocabulary, and also turning in one's mind many varieties of English expression. But I think I have learned something from noting convenient, terse, and happy turns of language when I have met them in my English reading. I can remember that I was past twenty before it ever occurred to me to use in English that idiom—very common in French, and now also, perhaps, too common in English—which places the passive participle before the noun with which the participle agrees. You find it now in every obituary column: 'Born in 18—, this celebrated man was destined, &c.' It ought never to be used except where you wish to call special attention to the participle, but

when rightly used it has the effect of varying the form of the sentence, besides emphasizing its participial word. *Dr. Abbott.*

"Unconsciously, I dare say, I have taught myself something of English composition in this way, but I think a caution is needed if one reads English authors with a view to the improvement of one's own style. It is so easy to fall into a servile trick of imitation that a student of style ought constantly to test and examine himself, to see that he is not being carried away by style from the thought which he is striving to express. Clearness and force of language must depend on clear and forcible thought, and that again depends on nature, experience, and training. As a part of this kind of training, I would especially recommend every one to master the meaning of metaphor, and to exercise himself in expanding metaphor into simile; also he should practise the art of defining, and learn the exact distinctions of words, and sometimes amuse himself by making up new words, not for public use, and by discovering combinations of thought which deserve, but have never yet received, the dignity of a separate name.

Dr. Abbott. I ought perhaps to add that I never publish anything till it has been so long in proof that I am able to forget it and criticise it coldly and dispassionately, picking holes in it where I can; and I freely invite friends to do the same. That is a great help to writing clearly."

Cardinal Manning. HENRY E., CARDINAL MANNING, writes:—"I believe one of the chief hindrances of the Christian Father is pulpit oratory. I mean the studied, elaborate, artificial, self-conscious declamation of Divine and Eternal truths. Simple nature, reality, forgetfulness of self, consciousness only of truth and souls, is the highest, most convincing, most persuasive of all preaching. If a man knows his mother-tongue, his logic, and his theology, let him avoid studied style and manner, and he cannot fail." What the Cardinal says so forcibly of preaching may be said with equal truth of written composition.

C. H. Spurgeon. CHARLES H. SPURGEON, like the Cardinal already quoted, is not only a powerful preacher, but a prolific author. As an

C. H. Spurgeon.

author his books have perhaps the largest circulation of any living pulpit luminary. "I cannot say," writes Mr. Spurgeon, "that I read in my early days at all with a view to style, but I think my Saxon comes of the Bible and John Bunyan. I have generally had too much care about what I had to say to give serious thought to the way of saying it. Tell your readers to get their matter into their minds, feel its tremendous weight, and then with their whole hearts endeavour to impart it. The style will come."

Stopford Brooke.

STOPFORD A. BROOKE, the author of Robertson's Life and many another helpful book, can no more say how he learned to write than he could say how he learned to walk. "But there is one rule which always holds good," he adds; "study the masters of any art in which you wish to excel, and study their masterpieces before you study their ordinary work. And next, whatever you desire to do, the only way to learn how to do it is to do it incessantly. If you want to learn how to walk, walk; if you want to learn how to write, write. Incessant practice, for years

Stopford Brooke.

and years, is the only secret; but never without having before you, lest you become slovenly or verbose, lest, in fact, you forget fine form, the masterpieces of the masters."

Canon Westcott.

B. F. WESTCOTT, (Canon of Westminster,) cannot say that he ever had the advantage of any special or definite training, either in writing or speaking. "It was my privilege at school to learn, under the first Bishop of Manchester, to believe in the exact form of words and to weigh their meaning carefully. As a schoolmaster, in my turn, I sought to convey to my pupils what I firmly believed; and in later years, with a wide field of teaching, it has been my single desire to show to others, as well as I have been able, the fragments of truth which have been made known to me, just as I saw them. As far as I can judge, personal conviction is the one secret of moving men. And as for expression, I do not know any other rule than that of taking infinite pains with the thought itself, which becomes clothed by the effort. I shrink from studying even the greatest authors with a view to catching their manner. Words and

thoughts alike must be the outcome of the whole man." *Canon Westcott.*

HUGH MACMILLAN brings to his work a wide range of reading and a most sympathetic power. He is a genuine lover of Nature, familiar with her truth and beauty. His style of writing is graceful and forcible. "I am not sure," he says, "that I can give you any contribution on the subject of your letter of the least value. Literary style is so much an individual thing, more appreciated perhaps by others than by the possessor himself, who is generally more alive to its defects and disabilities than to its excellences. At least, for myself, I can truly say that I wish oftentimes my style were quite different, and that I envy greatly the style of others I could name. I am painfully sensible of my weaknesses, and my inability to express as I would the thoughts that come to me by meditation, or from observation of the world of nature and man. My style, however, such as it is, has become part of myself, and I cannot change it. It has been the slow growth of nearly forty years; for I began to write for the Press *H. Macmillan.*

H. Macmillan.

when I was fifteen years of age. I have certainly taken as much pains as possible to make my meaning clear, and to find the most suitable words; and having a somewhat poetic imagination, I could not help giving a chromatic edge to the thoughts that passed through it. I have never consciously copied any models, and never tried to acquire a special style. Mine grew naturally; but having been brought into personal contact with Christopher North, Professor Aytoun, and men of that school, I suppose I learned unconsciously to imitate their flowing, redundant manner, and to write not *bullet* but *sheet lead!* I have often regretted the influence of such a style, which was the prevailing one in my younger days, upon my mode of composition, and wished I could have a more concise and graphic style. It is almost impossible to give any advice upon a subject so varied and individual as literary manner. You can only seek to impress upon others the necessity of being clear, concise, and expressive. The other peculiarities will be acquired insensibly by the individual, whose stream of thought will be as much tinctured by the

H. Macmillan.

medium through which it passes as a streamlet tastes of the qualities of its channel. Every writer should seek, above everything else, to be natural, to be himself. Imitation is always poor and weak. Every human being is unique; has some quality in which he is singular; and if he succeeds in impressing his own individuality by his writing upon others, he will have done them a service which no amount of imitation or conventional writing can impart. After all, the thought is the main thing; and when the fountain of thought is stirred by some angelic inspiration, however dark and dim it may be at first, it will clarify itself as it flows along, and ultimately become limpid and transparent, which is the perfection of style."

T. T. Munger

THEODORE T. MUNGER, author of "The Freedom of Faith" and other religious books that have a manly ring from cover to cover, says that he knows nothing of composition as an art. "I somewhat distrust treatment of composition as an art in the ordinary sense. I am not conscious of having a style. I simply try to say the thing I have in mind as well as

T. T. Munger. I can. If it happens to be good in style, I am unconscious of any process or rule by which it is such. If the thing is well said, it is because I saw clearly, felt deeply, and poured it out. Possibly I may have what we Yankees call a *knack*, but I am not conscious of it. So far as the art of composition can be taught, it seems to me to depend upon a knowledge of the elementary rules of grammar and rhetoric, and familiarity with good literature. Beyond that, it depends upon the man himself, the intellectual and æsthetic condition into which he brings himself. Therefore, I would not say to him, 'Study the art of composition,' but I would say, 'Improve yourself; learn to think clearly and intelligently; learn to feel nobly; purify and perfect your taste; fill yourself full of knowledge, &c.' That is, when you have got your man, you have got your style. All things are from within, out. Style is very largely moral—in the wider sense. An intelligent, trained, true, earnest, refined man will have a good style, and not without. Of course good judgment must preside. Without this the man will fall into all sorts of evil ways. But if one is not endowed with this faculty he

cannot be taught. I might also say that what is called a good style is a matter of ear, as in music. I have a friend who does not know a rule of grammar, but writes perfect and elegant English simply by the force of a clear mind, a fine nature, and a good ear. My own rule would be:—Be something, know something, feel truly, practise, and then let the style be what it will. It will reflect the man, and that is the true end of composition." *T. T. Munger*

I will now invite my readers to consider the experiences of a different class of authors to those we have already quoted in this connection. Some few of our present-day novelists, and one or two more general writers, may find a place here.

H. Rider Haggard is one of our most successful sensational romancers. Written in a cleverly realistic style, full of stirring adventure and picturesque description, weirdly uniting prosaic characters and common-place scenes with supernatural creatures like "She," or the witch in "King Solomon's Mines," his stories are truly effective, however doubtful *H. Rider Haggard.*

H. Rider Haggard.

may seem the wholesomeness of such literature. "I never entered on any special course of training with the view of succeeding in literature," says Mr. Haggard. "To be frank, I doubt the efficacy of such preparation. Of course, a certain amount of practice is necessary for the manufacture of successful fiction, inasmuch as the writer must know what to treat of and what to leave alone, what to select and what to reject. Also he must have a sense of proportion. Whether or not these things are to be learned it is beyond my power to say. Given those natural powers which are necessary to the production of really good fiction, it is probable they are; but without those natural powers disappointment must result."

Thomas Hardy.

THOMAS HARDY, author of "Far from the Madding Crowd," whose realistic and delicate skill in character painting is well known, says: "Any studied rules I could not possibly give, for I know of none that are of practical utility. A writer's style is according to his temperament, and my impression is that if he has anything to say which is of value,

and words to say it with, the style will come of itself." *Thomas Hardy.*

F. W. ROBINSON, a profuse novelist, best known by his story entitled "Poor Humanity," says he had no special training. "I think if all young writers would try to be unaffected and clear, and begin early enough, they would soon attain a style of their own, and a fair one, too. One hint I may give you, not a new one. I have been in my little way always in earnest about my work. The scenery of the London slums I have seen and studied before writing about, and the characters of my stories are parts of real beings I have met. This gives clearness of expression in style, probably always. Authors like artists, must have life models." *F. W. Robinson.*

MAXWELL GREY is the *nom de guerre* of Miss M. G. Tuttiett, the author of a few finely-conceived stories, written with rare charm. After excusing herself for sending so short a note on the ground of ill-health, she being scarce able to work for an hour and a-half a day, and that only on her "good days," she *Maxwell Grey.*

Maxwell Grey. says: "My personal experiences with regard to preparation for authorship and formation of style are a long series of heart-breaking failures, crowned at last by comparative success. Being self-educated, and having, according to the proverb, a fool for teacher, I tried to finish the steeple before laying the foundation. I will, however, say, that I believe the following to be the best methods for the acquisition of a good style: A thorough knowledge of that branch of logic called grammar; the habit of grammatically analysing, according to the rules given in Morell's Analysis; when possible, the study of grammar and analysis in other languages, the more the better; familiarity with the best writers in one's own and as many literatures as possible; a thorough historical knowledge of one's native language. But, after all, style, though it may be improved by cultivation, is in the end but the natural clothing of the thought, and a loose thinker will always express himself in a slovenly manner, for which reason I distrust Emerson. Further, more moral qualities go to the making of style than is commonly supposed; such homely virtues as self-restraint,

modesty, sincerity — see Ruskin's 'Seven Lamps of Architecture'—serve to light other than building arts. The habit of making verses is not to be despised; it is a pity an art so graceful and instructive is not more cultivated. It educates the ear, and accustoms people to select words; though it is liable to abuse, and tempts people to be flowery, and to fill in rhymes and stanzas with meaningless jingle. If there is any good in my style, which I have always aimed at perfecting, it is owing to the methods I have indicated. It ought to be a small lesson on style to compare 'Annesley' in Murray's with the 'Annesley' in volumes, just to show young folk the necessity of labour." *Maxwell Grey.*

ELIZABETH RUNDLE CHARLES is the author of "Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family," a series of pleasant stories, pure and lofty in tone, admirably written, and well-calculated to interest and benefit young readers. She says: "I can only give you my experience very briefly. I have never made any effort or special study how to say things. To be quite clear what I wanted to *Mrs. E. R. Charles.*

Mrs. E. R. Charles.

say seemed to me to ensure saying it in the best way possible for me. I have as little thought of manner in writing as in speaking, and I believe the best I have written I have written most easily. Labour, honest work, there must indeed be; but that has been in grasping the subject and in thinking it out. I believe, also, the best way to ensure a good manner is to keep good society, and that, happily, is open to all of us. The best thoughts of the best thinkers are ours. They are there, even if we do not go beyond our own great English literature—the sweetest singers, the most eloquent orators, the keenest investigators, the most imaginative and profoundest writers—they are there, in their books, at their very best, with their very best for us. Let us keep that high and gracious company, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Herbert, Taylor, and then the great later group, Scott, Wordsworth, Tennyson. But above all, before all, and through all, the English Bible, with its direct, rhythmical, homely English, simple enough for any fireside, stately enough for any solemnity."

Mrs. Mary E. Kennard.

MARY E. KENNARD says: "I can assure you I am a veritable ignoramus, and have no pretensions whatever to being a literary authority. I had no training, being one of five sisters imperfectly educated by foreign governesses who were unable to teach English composition. What little talent I possess is probably hereditary. My grandfather, Mr. Samuel Laing, was a well-known Norwegian traveller and author. My father, S. Laing, besides being a public man most of his life, is also the author of several scientific works. My own motto is—work. Never be content with what you have done, but try always to progress. To this end no pains should be spared. As an instance, the first book of mine, 'The Right Sort,' was written no less than four times from beginning to end, thus making twelve volumes of manuscript. One of my critics said that 'Mrs. Kennard's book had been written at a gallop.' I knew this was not the case, and that, whatever errors of inexperience I had committed, I had at least given to the public what was at that time my best endeavour. This consciousness consoled me for the criticism. . . . I generally

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make a rough copy in pencil of each chapter, having the general plot in my head. This I proceed to write down carefully, and revise every chapter three or four times as I go on. When finished, I frequently put my manuscript away for three or four months, and do not look at it in the interval. Then one's eye becomes keener to detect faults. People often say to me, 'Is it not a great amusement to write novels?' I do not think these people quite understand the sense of responsibility novel-writing brings. It is no more an amusement than any other work which requires long and sustained endeavour, perseverance, and mental attention. It has its rewards in the shape of occupation, increased knowledge of life and powers of observation; but it neither is nor ought to be regarded in the light of an amusement by any conscientious author."

Miss F. Mabel Robinson.

Another lady novelist, F. MABEL ROBINSON, says: "The idea of writing books never occurred to me until a few years ago, and I devoted most of my girlhood to painting, so that my literary education was comparatively

neglected and my work is less methodical than it would have been had I turned my attention to literature earlier. I expect, too, that I give myself a great deal of trouble that more methodical persons avoid. As my own style is far from what I wish it to be, and as I am conscious of a great want of classical knowledge, I feel some diffidence in expressing my views; for if I say that a very great attention to style seems to me an error, I feel that I am open to the retort, 'Yes, I should have guessed so from your writings;' but none the less do I think that the leading writers of our time are disposed to certain affectations and graces that will not add to the lasting value of their work. What you say is of more importance than the grace with which you say it; and if I were advising young writers, I should bid them first make quite sure of what they want to say, and then say it as plainly and as exactly as they can. It is better to hunt the right word half a morning than to rest satisfied with a word *à plie-près*. Style is to a very great extent a thing of fashion, but human feeling is for ever interesting. If the mind of an author be cultured his style is sure

Miss F. Mabel Robinson.

Miss F. Mabel Robinson.

to be sufficiently elegant, and if he be a person of little education his work may be none the less valuable, provided he be content to express himself with sincerity. I expect that had Burns striven to emulate the language of the English gentleman, his genius would have been smothered by the affectation of his style. At the best a laboured manner detracts from the illusion which the writer of fiction tries to produce."

Lady Dilke

EMILIA F. S. DILKE, one of our most cultured and most delightful female writers, whose books are always charming both for their lucidity and vivacity, writes: "As a child I had the run of an old-fashioned library, and I used to read a great deal of old English. I had scarcely ever any children's books, but knew Mallory's 'Morte d'Arthur,' Spenser's 'Faërie Queene,' and a good deal of Elizabethan and earlier literature almost by heart. All my life I have read much in this way, such classics as I could, incessantly, over and over again, but hardly any general literature. When I began to write for money on reviews, I used to try to be very

sure that every word I put on paper represented exactly what I had it in my mind to say; and still, if I cannot get the matter to my mind I write and rewrite till I have got it as near as possible. And, in the same way, if I think the arrangement of an argument or of any long piece of exposition unmethodical, I pull it to bits at once, and rewrite three or four times, until I feel sure that it is as lucid as I can make it. Only once or twice I have deliberately tried, as an exercise, to write something as elaborately modern as I could; but as soon as I found I could do it, I went back to the simple habit of insisting with myself that I should be sure of my thought, and next, sure that my words fitted, as well as words could, that thought. Any success I have had I think must be due to the taking of infinite pains to this end. After all, my husband thinks my French style in 'Claude Lorraine' better than my English style, except in my stories; and in those I believe the early reading of such things as the 'Morte d'Arthur' has unconsciously influenced every line." *Lady Dilke.*

I have a series of interesting contributions I

will now place before my reader, bearing more or less directly upon the topic of this chapter, written by several eminent American authors. Their names are mostly known to English readers, and, except in one or two instances, their works have a wide circulation here.

Will Carleton.

WILL CARLETON, the author of "Farm Ballads," and several books of poetry written with a genuine and homely pathos seldom equalled, says: "My preparation for life work consisted of a fair common-school training, four years in college, and what human nature I could gather in travelling through different parts of my own country. My purpose in writing is to connect all classes of people with one common bond of sympathy; to picture all grades of life in such a way that all grades will read, understand, and feel it, thus learning about each other and themselves; to induce the rich to help the poor, and the poor to pity even the sorrows of the rich; and, in fine, to touch and draw out that vein of poetry and feeling which exists somewhere in every human nature. My method of writing is to tell, as far as possible, my own thoughts and feelings in my own language, and the

thoughts and feelings of others in their language, and to remain unprejudiced and uninfluenced by other writers, using what I find in them as suggestions and not as dictation; to use them, indeed, not as masters, but as fellow-pupils. I cannot always escape the influence of old and established styles; I admire the genius of those who have done good work; but I cannot feel that it is my interest to be their slave. This often brings me attacks from the critics, especially in my own country; but I endure their bitterness very well, so long as the people continue with me, which I may say, without vanity, they have done. I do not often say so much about myself, and hope that in complying with your request I have in your estimation steered clear of egotism." *Will Carleton.*

JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY, the Irish-American poet, is described as having won, by his gifts of imagination and the captivating grace of his social presence, the reputation of being the most romantic figure in literary Boston. "If there is any style about my work," he says, "it is a style of thinking, not writing. The *J. B. O'Reilly.*

J. B. O'Reilly.

writing will take care of itself. I gave myself no special training in youth to form a style; I never thought of it. I was born among books, in a lovely and lonely country place in Ireland, surrounded with wonderful historical associations and monuments of ancient and unknown races. I am sure that this association, first of all things, made me think—by thinking I do not mean mere reflection, or reviewing of what might have been, but true excogitation. I found, even as a little boy, that many or most other people did not think; and that my thought, no matter what it was, excited more or less attention and remark. My father, and particularly my mother, were persons of fine sentimental individuality, and they unconsciously directed me. Then, in boyhood and manhood, I followed an ideal that led me through briers and marshes—the national liberty of my native country. This taught me great things—sincerity, faithfulness, silence, sacrifice, and hatred of injustice—and also opened my mind to the woful truth that error, prejudice, tyranny, &c., are habitual and conventional more than deliberate—that generations inherit their opinions as they do their

conditions. Then followed years of suffering for thinking these things . . . . during which the inner man was formed, and the style was only the flowing of the welled-up thought. *J. B. O'Reilly.*

"A man of this training, coming at twenty-five to this seething Republic, must go on thinking and speaking, and hence gain more or less facility of expression. All my life, from childhood, I have read great books. I knew Shakespeare at twelve as thoroughly as my little daughters of ten and twelve know him now. All children will love Shakespeare if he is read to them. I have passed all my waking leisure-time reading. The boy who reads Shakespeare year after year must acquire style, for he acquires thought and words—his deeper feelings are stirred. Growing into manhood the two writers who most profoundly affected and held me were Victor Hugo and Carlyle—strange masters for style, but noble masters for the inner and higher thing. Later, in Boston, I knew and loved our most eloquent American, Wendell Phillips. But the effect of all these upon me was without conscious desire on my part. That which we yield to becomes part of us, though. The only

J. B. O'Reilly.

style I have ever *sought* was clearness—to say my thought completely, briefly, and simply; to say it so that all should read my meaning. An involved sentence, or an imperfect sentence, seems to me to be a symptom of disease, a result of some twist, or pleurisy, or lesion in the finer brain-lines. A thought is always beautiful, and the less formality or verbosity about its expression the better. Were we well educated it would express itself as a seed expresses itself, simply, individually, nobly—here a grass-blade, there a strawberry, yonder a tree, elsewhere a field-flower. Style is a vile study. Individualism is the highest style; to be able to say how we see the world with our own eyes, and not with the conventional spectacles fitted on us at school."

W. D. Howells

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS has been called the Meissonier of literature. His ideal is to paint life as it is, simply to hold up the mirror to nature. This has led him to an elaborate analysis and minute portraiture, which certainly proves more of a weakness than a strength, in that the moralist is apt to get the better of the artist. Still, his books are always

powerful, and are composed with much grace and charm. Of himself he writes :—"I began to compose by imitating other authors. I admired, and I worked hard to get, a smooth, rich, classic style. The passion I afterwards formed for Heine's prose forced me from this slavery, and taught me to aim at naturalness. I seek now to get back to the utmost simplicity of expression, to disuse the verbosity I tried so hard to acquire, to get the grit of compact, clear truth, if possible, informal and direct. It is very difficult. I should advise any beginner to study the raciest, strongest, best *spoken* speech, and let the *printed* speech alone; that is to say, to write straight from the thought without bothering about the manner, except to conform to the spirit or genius of the language. I once thought Latinised diction was to be invited; I now think Latinised expression is to be guarded against." *W. D. Howells.*

GEORGE W. CABLE is one of the greatest American literary artists since Hawthorne. His stories of Creole life are full of dramatic action, of warm feeling, of a humour and a colouring all his own. "From quite an early *G. W. Cable.*

G. W Cable.

date in my school-experience as a boy," he says, "I developed a bent for literary production and construction, and by natural instinct studied style, but never had a teacher competent to teach the art; and as to books, studied only rhetoric, among text-books. As to my method, I am only conscious of one feature of it, and that is to conceive my reader as being a wise, noble, sincere person, able to appreciate grave and light treatment of subjects according to their fitness, and utterly intolerant of all affectation and ungenuineness; also a person with very little time to spare to listen to what I have to indicate. I am almost tempted to say that, as far as I know, this is my whole art."

F. R. Stockton.

FRANK R. STOCKTON is one of the most delightful humorists of America, skilful in discovering impossible and most amusing situations. His books are crowded with clever, bright, though extravagant, touches of nature. "I think I never studied any author," he writes, "with a view to the formation of my own style. I found, however, it was a very easy thing for me to unconsciously imitate the peculiarities of certain

styles which interested and pleased me, and it was for this reason, when a young man and writing for children, that I gave up entirely the reading of Hans Christian Andersen's books, for I found myself imitating his methods of expression. This I did not wish to do. His style, even as indicated in the translations I read, belonged to him, and I had no right to endeavour to acquire it. I mention this because I think it is the only instance in which I have considered the style of an author in reference to my own. Whatever merit my methods of expression may possess, is due, I believe, to my constant, earnest, and ever-anxious desire to make my readers understand what I mean. I work slowly, because I am not willing to have a sentence put upon paper until I am fairly certain that I could not have expressed it more clearly." *F. R. Stockton.*

JOHN TOWNSEND TROWBRIDGE is one of the purest American humorists. Both in poetry and prose he writes in spirited, realistic style. "I am almost as much at *J. T. Trowbridge.*

J. T. Trowbridge.

a loss to explain," he says, "how I came by my style of writing in prose or verse as I should be to account for the colour of my hair. It has been a more or less unconscious growth, and the essential quality of it, if it has any, is, I suppose, something inherent and inevitable. Yet a man may train his style as he may comb and arrange his hair and beard, and I have spent a good part of my life in trimming mine. I have never found treatises on style of very much use, although from my boyhood I was interested in books of that sort. The most they can do is to set up danger signals in places where young writers are prone to go wrong. For any positive help one must go to the works of authors who have really something to say, and can say it with freedom and force. How vast is the debt I owe to such inspiring examples I cannot express; I do not even know. But, after all, the key to a good, individual style I conceive to be this: A clear conception of what one wishes to portray, coupled with a conscientious and persistent endeavour to give it in words just the right colour. Con-

stant practice, with this principle in view, is what enables a writer to form a style corresponding with the qualities of his mind, the only true and natural style for him. He must learn to prune away unflinchingly all that obstructive and superfluous verbiage which veils his thought to his own mind or the reader's, and never rest contented to let a sentence or a line leave his pen that does not convey just the image, just the shade even, which he inwardly sees and feels. He will not always be able to satisfy himself in this, but the aim to do so is what makes style." *J. T. Trowbridge.*

GEORGE PARSONS LATHROP, the author of "An Echo of Passion," an eminent novelist and true poet, says: "It is not easy for me to tell you with exactness, and in short space, just what the influences have been which have formed me as a writer. On a general view they appear to have been simple enough, and yet I am aware there has been a good deal of complexity about them. I think I owe much, more than can be calculated, to the earnest, eager, conscientious, and unremitting *G. P. Lathrop.*

G. P. Lathrop.

efforts of my mother to make me write everything, as a boy, even to the simplest letter or note in ordinary correspondence, just as well as it was possible for me to do it within my powers and with the aid of her criticism. She would often make me rewrite a single letter, whether it were long or short, a dozen times, until its form and expression had been made simple, clear, graceful, serviceable, and specially fitted to the particular purpose for which the missive was intended. This established a habit of mind which, I am sure, has been the root of all my endeavours to develop a natural, pure, and harmonious style. My mother taught me more in this way than all the teachers, lecturers, and manuals that I ever encountered.

"For years, while I was a boy and when I was growing into manhood, it became my custom to observe carefully everything that struck me particularly, to try to analyse the characteristics which caused it to impress me, and then to define those characteristics in words within my own mind. As I walked the streets, or when I travelled, or met peculiar and interesting objects or persons anywhere, I

kept on trying to translate everything I saw into words, without following any conventional model, but, on the contrary, seeking only to find the form of words and word-sounds that would reproduce instantly and vividly the impression which I had just received. Often I would brood over these forms of words for hours, discarding one member of the phrase, inserting another, repeating the various forms half aloud, so as to see whether the music and the arrangement of the syllables reproduced sympathetically the feeling inspired by the original object. I think I gained more skill in the subtle art of using language picturesquely and penetratingly by these years of silent, incessant self-discipline, than in any other way. *G. P. Lathrop.*

"Certain books and authors had a stimulating and formative influence. Virgil did a great deal for me; Homer, oddly enough, not so much, although the Greek language inspired and helped me much more than Latin did. I count the study of German especially, and of Greek and Latin *through* German, at a 'gymnasium' in Saxony, as having done an immense amount for me in cultivating a fine

G. P. Lathrop.

discrimination as to the delicate shadings of words and significance of verbal sounds. Hawthorne, Dickens, Thackeray, were my chief masters in prose, although later I received a strong impulse from Milton's prose. From De Quincey I learned a great deal that was very valuable to me in the management of, or at least an appreciation for, subtle cadences and sonorous harmonies. In poetry, after Shakespeare and Milton, Keats, Tennyson, and Ralph Waldo Emerson have exerted the greatest sway over me I think, although Robert Browning has also entered largely into my intellectual life.

"I feel that I have now only begun to touch in lightly some of the points in this outline of my literary growth. But I can hardly be more elaborate in a letter. I may say, however, that the building up of a good style, which demands, first of all, the study of language, must find its chief support, next after that, in an absolutely earnest and unaffected determination to remain perfectly true to one's own thought, to express it simply, piercingly, yet delicately, with due knowledge of verbal melody and harmony, and to reproduce,

with single-minded fidelity, all the impressions we may receive from the life around us in words so true and direct that, like the rays which fall upon a sensitised photographic plate, they will record the impression and leave it to be reproduced on the reader's mind with a verisimilitude that defies doubt. *G. P. Lathrop.*

"Lest I be misunderstood, let me add here my belief that a writer, if he studies his own language deeply enough, whether in the formal, scholastic way, or in the way of intention and keen observation, which was presumably Shakespeare's method, can attain to the highest merits of style, with little or no aid from foreign and classical tongues. The study of dead languages, and of living languages other than our own, is just as likely to hurt the study of English style as to help it. All depends on the spirit and manner in which you use your acquirements from these sources. It is chiefly for comparative study they are useful; as a means of enlarging and illuminating one's conception of the structure and spirit of language in general and English in particular, and of sharpening the mind and

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ear so that they may sensitively discriminate shades of meaning and delicacies of verbal sound.

"Another point. I have found the actual study of music, and of a long observation of the aims and methods of painting, without actually trying to practise the latter art, advantageous as aiding to define the limitations of language, so that I might avoid trying to obtain exactly, with words, those effects that may be rendered more fitly in tones or tints; and at the same time leading me to feel and utilise the close relation between the three arts—literary, musical, and pictorial. The quality of style in literature is akin to touch in music, say on the piano or violin, or a composer's method of handling and combining the various tones in an orchestra, and to colouring in the work of a painter. I cannot agree with Herbert Spencer that it should vary in one individual, accordant with varying mood and theme, to the extent of taking on at different points the traits of other writers' styles. Let your style be as flexible as you can make it, bold, free, yet nicely adaptable to the most diverse moods and subjects; yet, if

it be a good and honest style, it never can be chameleonised into imitation of other authors. Never allow the integrity of your own way of seeing things and saying things to be swamped by the influence of a master, however great. And while you resolutely avoid straining after an appearance of originality, do not easily be persuaded to give up an epithet or phrase which may seem to another mind forced, if you are once convinced, in all proper humility, that it is the only medium by which you can convey your own meaning as it presents itself to you. It seems to me that your mode of using written speech and my mode of using it ought to emanate from and indicate our several individualities as clearly as our voices do. You may train and develop your voice, may improve its modulations, learn to pronounce well and enunciate plainly and finely, and you may increase the range of your tones so that they will play with freedom and power through the gamut of emotional utterance, of emphatic and convincing declaration, of tender, soothing, or pathetic accent, and at another time will sing forth in impassioned appeal. But all the elocution in

G. P. Lathrop.

G. P. Lathrop. the world cannot change your voice into another's. The same principle underlies literary style. An author's style must be distinctly his own: sterling, individual, and inconvertible."

Blanche Howard. BLANCHE WILLIS HOWARD, an American novelist, whose stories are full of pathetic beauty and human interest and written with charming freshness of style, says she cannot relate any personal experiences, nor can she give any statement of method, because she has none, but can only contribute a few desultory hints. "What an author writes," she urges, "is, after all, the sum total of his life, his knowledge, his experience, his temperament, his soul; and 'style' is the attire in which he clothes his thoughts. The only advice, then, which I should give, which I would presume to give young writers, is: 'Look in thine own heart and write.' In other words, be true. My theory may be false, but I believe that every author's soul may be found in his works, sometimes masked, it is true, sometimes well-concealed; but always there, and always most perceptible to the spirits akin to his own. What

comes from the heart, and only that, touches the heart. There is room for many kinds of writers in this great world; there is room for the romancists and the realists, as there is room for the Sistine Madonna and a Meissonier battle-piece, for a Defregger peasant-interior and a visionary, saintly, tender Fra Angelico. *Blanche Howard.*

"Each artist, writer, or painter tells his story. He cannot pass beyond his limitations, he cannot write more than he is, or knows—but his aspiration, his endless longing for something better than he is or knows, reveals itself in his work; and therefore, while methods, fashions, and tastes change, *truth* is the note that lives and sounds on through the ages. In adventure, in fanciful and wild romance, there can be this note of truth, which may fail in commonplace description. For instance, in the work of an undoubtedly gifted young author I observed recently these expressions: 'his lush smiles,' and somebody's 'claret eyes.' Now, in the light of pure reason, what is a 'lush smile,' and what are 'claret eyes'? This is not poetry. It is not genius. It is balderdash, and it makes one ill. Contrast

Blanche Howard.

these untruths with Tennyson's lines on the eagle:

> He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
> Close to the sun in lonely lands,
> Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.
>
> The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
> He watches from his mountain walls,
> And like a thunderbolt he falls.

Here the poet uses his license, but his figure is strong, simple, and true. Whereas, in the prose which I quote, 'lush' and 'claret' are untrue. The extreme of realism is ugliness, crime, and the sights, sounds, and odours of hospitals. The extreme of idealism is 'lush' and 'claret,' as quoted. Surely truth may be found between the two. Surely a rose is as true as an onion; surely a youth sauntering down the Boulevard des Italiens is no truer than when he gives up his life for his friend, or when he leads a forlorn hope in deadly battle for his fatherland!

"We all preach better than we practise. I know no reason why I should lay down the law before any writer, old or young. I perceive too clearly what I would do, and what I cannot reach, to attempt to instruct any human soul. Yet without arrogance I

would say to any and every young writer, as I say every day and every hour to myself: Be honest, be fearless. In every heart lie the possibilities of love and suffering and tragedy. Seek the truth that is near you—do not imagine it in India, or in the planet Mars. Write the truth as you see it, without fear or petty prejudice. If it be truth it will finally prevail. Picture the ugly, and the hospital atmosphere, and animal life if you will, but not always, since—thank God!—though these be true, faith, and friendship, and peace, and loyalty, and love, and rapture are no less true in this changing world of ours (whatever comes, God's world!), and whoever paints only the painful, cruel, and loathsome is no less morbid and false than he who paints only the 'lush' and the 'claret.' The true, the wholesome, the human, with all its pain and temptation and error, yet always with its hope and heart and loving-kindness, is around us, near us on every side. Let the young writer paint this as he sees it. Let him be fearless and true. Let him read in season and out of season; let him observe, and feel, and live,

Blanche Howard.

Blanche Howard.

and write. Let him avoid 'scarlet lips,' since lips are never scarlet, as an eminent French painter once informed me. Let him ask himself sternly: Is this true? *Could* Adolph bear the tolerably plump and well-grown Araminta hours and hours in his arms through the primæval, trackless forest? To prove it, let Tom try to carry Mary a half-hour! And so in other and more important examples.

"I end as I began: Be honest. Write the simple truth, and style will take care of itself. My own attainments seem so slight to me, I hesitate to refer to them. Except that I have read largely, omnivorously, and lived fearlessly, even when to my own worldly disadvantage, I can think of nothing to say of my own life. It would interest me to know what others, and those better able to give suggestions and instruction, have replied to your appeal."

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At last I bring this series of interesting and useful experiences and counsels to a close. It has proved a long, though far from unpleasant labour, to gather these fragments and work them into their present association. I would

fain hope that what has thus been placed before the reader will not be without special interest and value, but will at least have some small influence in quickening him to higher and better endeavours in his own special field of duty and service. For, however varied these testimonies are, their teaching is the same. In one form or another all express the fact, which indeed some have, in so many words, stated, that truthfulness to self is, in any and every sphere of life, the only secret of power. And that is a lesson we all need, and all may profit by. To take whatever work God has given us to do, and with our whole heart strive to do it honestly, heartily, truthfully, careless whether men praise or condemn, careless whether the outcome be reward of fame or censure, only anxious that it shall be well and nobly done, is the one sure path to the highest, purest, best and worthiest art. For what is art but the doing of anything as well as it can be done? To be artistic is to be faithful, to be true to our highest ideal, conscientiously to finish everything and to leave nothing in a slovenly condition, to do with our might whatever

our hands find to do. The humblest worker becomes an artist when moved by such a purpose; the simplest work becomes a work of art when thus accomplished.

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